

Donald Davidson: *How to Understand his Philosophy of Language in
Terms of the Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction*

by

Øystein Buran

Thesis presented for the degree of
Master in Philosophy



Supervised by Professor Bjørn T. Ramberg

Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas
The Faculty of Humanities

University of Oslo

May 2011

Preface and Acknowledgements

I was led into writing this thesis as a result of reading, quite superficially, some of Donald Davidson's later texts on the nature of language. I was never confronted with Davidson's philosophy of language throughout undergraduate studies. These studies were, by the way, unbalancedly composed of philosophy of language and linguistically oriented semantics (with a bias not in favor of Davidson's views). I found that his reasonings expressed through the denial of the importance of knowledge of language for the success of verbal communication, seemed too radical and implausible to be given much importance upon the first readings. While it is true that (perhaps) many have the same intuitions as I had upon confronted with these essays, I could not let the uneasiness rest before I had some idea of what Davidson was trying to do. The work with this thesis throughout the past ten months has given me precisely this: prescription for the uneasiness and an excellent opportunity to undisturbedly delve into Davidson's dense texts in the philosophy of language.

I would like to direct warm and appreciative thanks to my supervisor Bjørn Ramberg for enlightening talks, his adjustive understanding and wise guidance. Some of the original suggestions and comments I bring forth in this thesis had not been so clearly brought out had it not been for his captaincy through these uncharted waters.

Elin Munkerud should also receive special thanks in providing valuable comments on a final draft of this thesis.

Contents

<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>Contents</i>	vii
Overview	2
1. The Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction	5
1i. The Contextualists	8
1ii. The Formalists	12
 <u>PART I</u>	
2. The Semantic Programme	16
2i. A Theory of Truth as a Theory of Meaning	18
3. Davidson's Methodological Stance	23
3i. Radical Interpretation	23
3ii. The Concept of Belief	26
Preliminary Remarks	32
 <u>PART II</u>	
4. Davidson and the Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction	34
4i. The Determination of Content	34
4ii. The Problems of Determining Linguistic Meaning	37
4iii. The Remedy in the Case of Linguistic Meaning	41
4iv. Introducing Distinctions: The Case from Malapropisms	43
4v. The Prior Theory and The Passing Theory	48
5. The Marginalized Semantics and the Mysterious Pragmatics	54
5i. Different Circumstances or Different Competencies?	54
5ii. A Theory of Meaning and a Theory of Communication	57
5ii.a. Radical Interpretation Revisited	58
5iii. Intentions in First Meaning and Speaker Meaning	59
5iv. First Meaning: A Semantic Kind?	68
5iv.a. The Semantic Programme Revisited	70
5v. Suggestion: Going From A Prior to a Passing Theory	73
Final Remarks	76
Bibliography	80

Overview

How could one separate the study of what words and sentences in natural languages mean from the study of the way agents use languages? In the discipline of the philosophy of language there have been disagreements about the goals of explaining the nature of languages and the means used to this end. As a consequence, different specialized areas have evolved and focused on distinctive areas in the comprehensive study of natural language. What serves as a background for my interest in this thesis is the difference in opinion between two ways of approaching the study of meaning in language and the agents involved in creating this meaning. As there is no clear picture of how language helps us in sharing thoughts, there is no clear picture of what the nature of language is. I wish to contribute to such an understanding.

My main interest seen against this background lies with one American philosopher particularly influential in the discipline of the philosophy of language in the latter half of the 20th century: Donald Davidson (1917-2003). While his legacy in truth-conditional semantics is considerable, he is also much discussed for his views on the nature of language and communication. While these two areas of the discipline are sometimes thought of separately, I will show that there are difficulties in separating so-called theories of meaning from theories of communication. Davidson argues that there is a pattern in natural languages which can be captured by a formal theory of truth. Such a formal approach to language is often thought of as standing in contrast with a study of the agents that use language for communication. While Davidson, besides his semantic concerns, particularly present in his early work, starts to worry more and more about how the agents influence what is expressed through their utterances, we are given good reasons to interpret Davidson on the background of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics.

Davidson is, at least implicitly, concerned about the difference between what words semantically mean when used in a context, and what they can be used to communicate. This is clear in several essays published in the 1980's and 1990's, particularly in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs."¹ One question that becomes important quite early in my exegetical endeavors, is to see how we can separate semantic meaning from pragmatic meaning within Davidson's framework. The reason for this difficulty is to be found in his approach to the understanding of meaning (and thought) via his project of radical interpretation. Here it is the third person perspective – in attributing meanings and thoughts to

¹ Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," 1986, in *Truth, Language, and History*, Reprint 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 91.

speakers – which is considered to be the basic methodological approach in answering questions about meaning. These questions become deeply connected with the circumstances of utterance, and thus a separation of language *per se* from language as used by agents becomes difficult. Why such a separation is in effect present in his philosophy becomes clear in at least two respects. One, Davidson does not want to lose what he calls the autonomy of meaning. It is not clear, however, how he can keep an autonomy of meaning while still arguing for the primacy of the idiolect over the language. Two, it is in another respect difficult to single out natural language meaning due to the view that it is intertwined with belief. This interdependence is a result of Davidson's views on the holistic character of meaning and belief.

In order to assess Davidson's programme in light of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics I must first present his general framework. In part one I will present his two projects in the philosophy of language. One project is that of providing a theory of meaning for a language by the use of a definition of truth. This is to be able to explain what Davidson takes as a fundamental condition on any theory of meaning: the need to account for how finite beings can produce and understand an infinity of never yet heard sentences. The second project, which integrates the first one, is the mentioned project of radical interpretation. Here Davidson wants to explain what it means that sentences have meaning, and the proposed stance of the radical interpreter should ensure that we do not make use of the concept we want to illuminate. It is also in radical interpretation that we find the application of the principle of charity. In discussing this we will be confronted with some of the problems presented by the semantics-pragmatics distinction.

It is not until we reach part two that I will begin the twin project of building a coherent exegesis by rethinking Davidson's project of radical interpretation to accommodate his views expressed in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs". This will be combined with a critical survey of how one could map Davidson, so understood, on to a difference between the semantics of natural language with the ways agents use language to communicate thoughts. Before we get there, it will be necessary to ask how Davidson could separate and define semantic meaning in order to keep one part of the semantics-pragmatics pair fixed. Here we will see how the concept of a circumstance presents problems for the purposes of mapping Davidson on to the semantics-pragmatics interface.

I will spend much time on discussing "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" as it is here that Davidson offers us the best angle from where to understand his views on the nature of

communication and language. This is seen through his distinction between first meaning and dictionary meaning, and the construction of two theories to illuminate the nature of language. It is also here that he challenges his earlier views on what a theory of meaning might look like. We will also find the clearest breaking point between semantics and pragmatics in these discussions, as Davidson here minimalizes the explanatory force of a theory of meaning in favor of pragmatic approaches, though the favorability is not given in an optimistic tone. It will be particularly important to show how speaker intentions fit into this picture, especially in order to show in what ways Davidson is a Gricean.

In the course of the discussion in part two, the focus will become sharper, the critical gaze more refined and the creative suggestions explicit. I will, due to what we have found out about Davidson in part one and the first chapter of part two, criticize one major assumption underlying much of the literature written within the semantics-pragmatics field. My discussion will finally culminate in a promising suggestion of one way one could interpret Davidson so as to integrate him with relevance theoretic approaches to the understanding of linguistic and communicative competence.

The structure of this thesis is to be characterized by its balance between a suggestive and assertoric form. It is not clear how one could understand Davidson in terms of the semantics-pragmatics distinction, so I will pose questions, reject and modify answers, and finally try to reach ways one could understand Davidson, and how his framework could be further developed. You will not get my final saying in many of these difficult issues. I will instead guide you through what is my main aim in this thesis: understanding Davidson's philosophy of language in terms of the very important and much discussed semantics-pragmatics distinction.

*We want a deeper notion of what words, when spoken in context, mean; and like the shallow notion of correct usage, we want the deep concept to distinguish between what a speaker, on a given occasion, means, and what his words mean.*²

1. The Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction

Historically, the semantics-pragmatics distinction arose in the 1950s as a response to the logical approach to the understanding of language in the work of, among others, Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell and Alfred Tarski. This so-called *ideal language* perspective on language was contrasted with the *ordinary language* approach, with the later Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, P. F. Strawson, and H. P. Grice as its foremost proponents.³ A response to Russell's theory of definite descriptions in 1950 by Strawson, and the subsequent reply to that again by Russell, is characteristic of the divide between the two approaches. Russell says that there is a

fundamental divergence between myself and many philosophers with whom Mr. Strawson appears to be in general agreement. They are persuaded that common speech is good enough not only for daily life, but also for philosophy. I, on the contrary, am persuaded that common speech is full of vagueness and inaccuracy, and that any attempt to be precise and accurate requires modification of common speech (...).⁴

What this quote shows, is what I take to be a difference in ways of approaching the nature of language, and more importantly what the nature of language is. I take Strawson to account for language in use, while Russell is optimistic about a reformation of language, transcending the inaccuracies of natural languages.

But why did the need for this distinction surface? The ideal language approach (henceforth the formal, or semantic approach) did not try to present an account of the meaning of languages *in use*, that is, natural languages. They focused on formalized languages, and tried to show how meaning – a theory of semantics – could be given formally, in abstraction from the ordinary use of language. Their goal was the reformation of language into an unambiguous and precise language, fit to serve various scientific purposes. It was the numerous reactions to this approach to the study of language that gave rise to the distinction.

² Ibid., 91.

³ François Recanati, "Pragmatics and Semantics," in *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, reprint 2007, ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 442.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, "Mr. Strawson on Referring", in *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., ed. A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 263.

On the most general level, the ordinary language approach introduced linguistic *agents* into the definiens. So, Austin for instance, showed how one can *do* things with sentences by performing speech acts which go beyond possible semantic propositions expressed by sentences, but that express the intentions of the speaker. He termed these speech acts performatives. What was special about these phenomena was that explanation of the acts in terms of truth was futile, as the actions had success conditions, rather than truth conditions. The utterance of the promise in (1), to take one example, is characteristic of a performative:

(1) I will pick you up at the airport tomorrow

In uttering (1), you thereby (implicitly) promise to do as you say, pending on the felicity conditions of a promise (e.g. intentions to hold one's promise). What Austin was occupied with, was how one could perform actions simply in virtue of utterances, and he believed that these acts were not describable in terms of truth. While one could perhaps explain what an "utterance *means*, there is a further question distinct from this as to what was the *force*, as we may call it, of the utterance".⁵

Grice was another prominent figure who managed to draw a distinction between what words mean and what a speaker could intimate by an utterance of such words: roughly, what is said and what is conversationally implicated. This distinction, moreover, corresponds to the familiar separation of *sentence meaning* from *speaker meaning*, respectively, or in Gricean terms, what is said and utterer's meaning. Further, the important sentence-speaker meaning distinction is not restrained to Grice's implicatures, as metaphoric uses of language and sub-sentential utterances show. The distinction can be summarized, for our purposes at this juncture, as follows: A speaker, by uttering a sentence, could communicate more than, or something different from, what the sentence means. A conversational implicature is a good illustration of the distinction.

(2) A: "Will you finish your master's thesis in time?"

B: "The building I live in was recently severely damaged by a fire"

A: "Oh..."

⁵ J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," 1961, in *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., ed. by A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 144.

What is communicated by the speaker B? Clearly uncertainty as to whether she would actually finish her thesis in time, but there is nothing in the meaning of the sentence she uttered that conveys this thought. She could just as well utter this sentence when calling up to inform her insurance company of what had happened, and there would be nothing about the completion of a master's thesis communicated in that situation. What the speaker means often *departs from*, or somehow means something *different than* what the sentences mean. Grice showed – under the guidance of the co-operative principle – how one could understand utterer's meaning when it departed from what was said. We will return to what distinctions might be useful in the case of such divergences in chapter four.

The point in these two perspectives from Austin and Grice is that the study of the nature of language cannot be reduced to a formal study, abstracted from the practices of it. Such formal approaches, Robyn Carston said, led to “a gross underestimation of the context-sensitivity of natural language utterances, a lack of interest in the nuances of non-logical word meaning and a sidelining of all sentence types other than declaratives”.⁶ The work of Donald Davidson in the 1960's may be seen as an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the formal approach by taking seriously the social nature of language. At that time, Davidson wrote that the “prospects for a formal semantical theory of a natural language [were] very poor (...) and I believe most logicians, philosophers of language, and linguists agree”.⁷ In spite of this, one of the things Davidson set forth in “Theories of Learnable Languages”⁸ and “Truth and Meaning” was precisely an ambition to overcome this lack of focus on the social nature of language. He sought not a reformation of language, as his predecessors had hoped for, but a description of it. Still, he thought that such a description could be achieved by formal means. Such optimism has not been dampened over the years. It has rather refined itself, and made clearer what is at stake, and what the alternatives are. The most obvious example of such a refinement is perhaps Kaplan's treatment of indexical expressions.

The debate over the semantics-pragmatics distinction today is not so much concerned with whether a formal or an informal approach to language is better suited to serve the purposes of understanding natural languages, as it is with delegating the proper investigative aspects of language to its correct domain. Put in a coarse manner at this juncture, we can say

⁶ Robyn Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 3.

⁷ Donald Davidson, “Truth and Meaning,” 1967, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27-28.

⁸ Donald Davidson, “Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages,” 1965, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

that semantics is concerned with the linguistic meaning of words and sentences, while pragmatics is concerned with how meaning in language is, and can be used. One thing the debaters disagree about is where to draw the line between the two domains. I will exemplify some of the approaches as I go along.

1i. The Contextualists

Inspired by the ordinary language philosophers, the debaters in the pragmaticist camp today are, among others, the neo-Griceans in the relevance-theoretic framework of Sperber & Wilson, where Carston is particularly noticeable. Other contextualists include Kent Bach and François Recanati.

Relevance Theory is a cognitive theory that centers on the concept of relevance. A speaker provides evidence for her intentions, for instance by providing the interpreter with a linguistic logical form in a context. The cognitive part of the theory states that human minds are “geared to the maximization of relevance”, and utterances create expectations of such relevance.⁹ In many senses, we can detect similarities between Davidson’s program and that of the relevance theorists. Inferences play important roles in both frameworks, as in the case of the recognition of Gricean intentions. These recognitions will include the inferring of conclusions, from assumptions in the contexts of utterance, about what it is in the context that is relevant or salient, and what the speaker’s intentions might have been. There are, however, points where Davidson and the neo-Griceans clearly part. Their view on sentence meaning is one example; another is their different views on the overall picture of how agents interpret speakers.¹⁰ I will return to this latter difference in a discussion in chapter five.

We may generally sort those that concentrate on pragmatic approaches to language into a *contextualist* camp. The discussions in the semantics-pragmatics debate very often circle around the completeness of propositions, and what kinds of mechanisms determine propositions.¹¹ Distinctions are then made as to how much context-sensitivity is considered allowed in the determining of a proposition, so one pragmaticist may consider herself to be a radical contextualist, while others settle for a moderate view. This could, respectively, either

⁹ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” in *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, reprint 2007, ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004).

¹⁰ On the latter point, see Robyn Carston and Georg Powell, “Relevance Theory - New Directions and Developments,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, ed. Ernest Lepore and Barry C. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 353.

¹¹ The reason that I view the issue about the semantics-pragmatics distinction as, at least in part, a question about how to secure propositional *completeness*, becomes apparent when you consider incomplete propositions, whatever they may be. These cannot state truth conditions, and to be unable to state truth condition would be to be unable to give an account of the meaning of sentences (within a truth-oriented semantic framework).

be reflected in the view that a complete proposition is, *as a general rule*, not given solely in terms of the linguistic elements that go into expressing it, or that a complete proposition must, *in some cases*, be determined by something other than the linguistic elements that go into expressing it. Linguistic elements, moreover, is a contested term, so it is not easy to say what would define going beyond such elements in completing propositions. We could give a tentative meaning to the term linguistic element if we spoke of the *literal* meaning of words and sentences. Then you might of course go on to ask what literal meaning is, and I will reply: that which is encoded in the words, and is always present in the occurrence of the word or sentence. This is, as we will see in the second part of this thesis, not a good way of putting it. Nonetheless, at this juncture I rest my definition on what a good dictionary of philosophy has to say about it: “*Literal meaning* is the non-figurative, strict meaning an expression or sentence has in a language by virtue of the dictionary meaning of its words”.¹²

So what is either always or sometimes needed to complete a proposition? One must draw on the context of utterance to enrich, or go beyond, the linguistic elements. Without such additional mechanisms, a complete proposition – and thus, a thought – is not conveyed. There are different reasons for thinking this. For instance, an utterance of the sentence

(3) Donald is ready

can express different thoughts, or propositions. Donald can be ready to go to the airport; he could be ready for breakfast; ready to go to work; and so forth. If this sentence is to be considered in a non-contextual vacuum, then what proposition can we say is expressed by (1)? The proposition that *Donald is ready*? What does it mean that Donald is ready simpliciter? He is usually in a state of readiness for something or other, so can we without absurdity say that there is a thought expressed here, in isolation from a context of use? No, a contextualist would reply, and different proposals as to how to complete the proposition are given from a pragmatic point of view. What this example is meant to show, is what Carston labels the *linguistic underdeterminacy thesis*: “the meaning encoded in the linguistic expressions used, the relatively stable meaning in a linguistic system, meanings which are widely shared across a community of users of the system, underdetermines the proposition expressed”.¹³ We mentioned, moreover, that Carston works within the relevance-theoretic framework of Sperber & Wilson. They also claim that the semantics of a sentence is underdetermined.

¹² Brian Loar, “Meaning,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed Robert Audi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 545.

¹³ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*, 19-20.

Sentence meanings, for them, are “incomplete logical forms, i.e. at best fragmentary representations of thoughts”.¹⁴

Other contextualists, such as Bach, say that a “speaker cannot mean just what is determined (...) by what his words mean”, because sentences do not necessarily constitute complete propositions.¹⁵ In the case of (1) then, the sentence only forms, semantically, a propositional radical as he calls it; i.e. not a complete thought. By alluding to underdetermination, as Carston does, Bach also commits himself to contextualism when he writes that underdetermination shows that “a complete proposition would be expressed, a truth condition determined, only if the sentence were elaborated somehow”.¹⁶ This elaboration is *as a general rule* needed, because “it is generally true that the sentences we use do not make fully explicit what we mean”.¹⁷ Additionally he thinks that semantics does not need to give truth conditions for sentences, but that this would not undermine compositionality. It does, however, on the face of it undermine Davidson’s position, when he writes that his view does “undermine the naïve assumption that the output of a semantic theory for a language is a (recursive) specification of the truth conditions for all its (declarative) sentences”.¹⁸ This naïve assumption is thought to be Davidson’s assumption, and that of other semanticists with him, so it seems that we at the outset can contrast Davidson quite clearly with Bach’s position. This position is furthermore something it would be worth while returning to after I have presented a more nuanced picture of what truth-conditional semantics are committed to.

Recanati is another contextualist who offers an account of what he calls *truth-conditional pragmatics* (henceforth TCP), as contrasted with truth-conditional semantics. The idea is that pragmatic processes can determine the truth-conditions of a sentence in ways that *do not* depend on, or are mandated by, the linguistic elements in the sentence. A pragmatic process which is normally thought of as being so mandated, is the assignment of values to indexical expressions. In such cases, the pragmatic process depends in some way on the linguistic elements in the sentence. Recanati’s point is that TCP make use of ‘free’ pragmatic processes, processes which “are not mandated by the linguistic material but respond to wholly

¹⁴ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995),

193

¹⁵ Kent Bach, “Conversational Implicature,” *Mind & Language* 9, no 2 (June 1994), 127.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kent Bach, “Minding the Gap,” in *The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*, ed Claudia Bianchi (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2004), 38.

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

pragmatic considerations”.¹⁹ In a coarse sentence meaning/speaker meaning distinction, the idea would be that pragmatic processes do not influence only the latter part of the pair, but sentence meaning as well. This will, in effect, further delineate the explanatory work semantics has for understanding the nature of language, for the reason that under such a view semantics is not deemed sufficient for the determining of truth-conditional content. If you want your (propositional) semantic theory to say something about what is expressed and understood in communication, i.e. thoughts, then it is not an unreasonable ambition to try to show in what way it is propositional.

Moreover, Recanati says that “once pragmatics is allowed to play a role in the determination of truth-conditional content, it is somewhat arbitrary to set limits to its operation, as Minimalism [i.e. formalism] attempts to do”.²⁰ I think this point about arbitrariness is a quite important one. What makes it the case that formalists accept pragmatic intrusion into the determining of content when it comes to indexicals, but demand to draw the line there? What is at stake for the formalists in their effort to restrict the scope for pragmatic processes in the determination of the proposition expressed? I will return to some of the motivations that might guide a formalist approach to language below. Let me simply mention a possible counter-reply to this. A converse burden of justifying the apparent arbitrariness may reasonably be laid on the shoulder of the pragmaticist; how much *semantic* content can influence the proposition expressed by a speaker, and how do you explain its nature and its scope? That is, to what extent is a proposition expressed determined by semantic mechanisms, and what are these mechanisms?

From this observation about arbitrariness we can in fact detect a clear convergence of thought between semanticists and pragmaticists. This agreement is to be found in the fact that indexicals such as ‘I’, ‘tomorrow’ and ‘here’ need a context of utterance to become truth-evaluable. Still, this need not be an obstacle to a formal treatment of meaning. The semantics-pragmatics distinction comes into play when one tries to *adjust the scope* of contextual contribution to the proposition expressed beyond these obviously context-sensitive elements. One of the most influential examples in the literature on why such an adjustment should be carried through is the appeal to the underdeterminacy of linguistic meaning.

What have been neglected in this fragmentary account are the nuances and important differences between different contextualist positions. Nonetheless, one key idea tying all these

¹⁹ François Recanati, *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

contextualist views together can be given in terms of the idea that meaning in language cannot be given formally, because it cannot be given in isolation from context of use. To not be able to be accounted for in isolation from contexts of use, is usually thought to be tantamount to not being formally compatible. Consequently, then, if we accept thoughts to be identified as propositional content, then formal linguistic meaning does not *ipso facto* constitute thoughts. This follows from the observation of what seems to be a common premise in the debate, namely that the thoughts that are expressed in communication, that is, the objects of discussions, are identified as propositions. So in light of this, we could, as I have done here, turn the issue of the semantics-pragmatics distinction into one about what it is that constitutes a proposition. (This, of course, hinges on one's view of communication. Are there really propositions that are to be identified in successful communication?)

1ii. The Formalists

How would a formalist approach the interface? What formalists try to show, is that a semantic theory can account for what a sentence means in terms of its simple linguistic elements, and how they combine to form complex expressions, i.e. truth-evaluable propositions. Davidson clearly adheres to some such view. Provisionally, at this stage, we can reflect Davidson's own view on what an account of natural languages – as given in a theory of meaning – must consist in. It must

be able to specify, in a way that depends effectively and *solely on formal considerations*, what every sentence means. (...) our theory should equip us to say, for an arbitrary sentence, what a speaker of the language means by that sentence (or takes it to mean) (...) relativized to times, places and *circumstances*.²¹

To say what a sentence means, is to give the conditions under which it would be true (more on that to follow). What I want to highlight at this point is the formal condition, together with the italicized expression 'circumstances'. The former instruction, restricting the account to "solely (...) formal considerations", seems to demand of a theory of meaning that all natural language phenomena, such as vagueness, indexicality, ambiguity and quantifier expressions, must be accounted for within a formal framework. The difficult work of trying to meet this restriction is in fact carried out today by various semanticists. The success of their effort is contested by pragmaticists, both on the principled ground that defining meaning should be explained by resorting to linguistic agents, but also on a somewhat more detailed level where

²¹ Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages," 8 (my italics).

particular natural language phenomena are considered. The latter term ‘circumstance’, however, stirs up a hornet’s nest. What precisely should the term include, and how are we to account for the manner in which it determines sentence meaning? Work has been done to account for indexicals, so that we could give time, place and speaker a formal treatment, a treatment that many linguists and philosophers of language could, on a general level, agree to. A more serious difficulty lies in presenting a philosophically useful account of what a circumstance is (or what we today would call context). What Davidson says here is that a speaker means *M* by an utterance *U* of a sentence *S*, relativized to time, place and *the circumstance of utterance*. The semantics-pragmatics debate concerns what such circumstances might be, and how one could capture their alleged influence on the semantic content expressed.

A list of prominent formalists nowadays representing the semantics side of our distinction include (the neo-Davidsonians) Herman Cappelen & Ernie Lepore, together with Jason Stanley and Emma Borg.²² How would the approach of Cappelen & Lepore for instance, fare with cases like (3)? They turn away from the question, “What does ‘Donald is ready’ simpliciter mean”, in the spirit of Carston, and ask instead “What are the criteria by which one proposition is deemed incomplete and another complete?”²³ What is the difference, for instance, between alleged completeness in cases like (3) and cases like

(4) Donald is ready to go to the airport

Cappelen & Lepore ask. They purport to show that the so-called incompleteness arguments typically run to show the apparent absurdity of (3), and thus against their own minimalist account, are fundamentally faulty, in that they would, if sound, be equally problematic for contextualist accounts. One can just as well construct incompleteness arguments for (4) as for (3). Simply construct good, intuitive cases, and you might gain support for an argument that shows why (4) does not express a full proposition; is Donald ready to go to the airport now? Later today? Or is he packed, all ready to go to the airport tomorrow, after he has taken a shower and eaten breakfast? When is a proposition really complete? And what would identify such demarcation, what could possibly constitute criteria that might be neutral between the two camps? In so far as these questions remain open, it is not clear that there is a greater onus

²² These are, as with the contextualists, picked from a larger group of which I take them as representative. Without denying the fact that there are significant differences between theorists working more or less in the same tradition, it will become clear that it is not all that important for my exegetical concerns in this thesis, which particular proponents we focus on.

²³ Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 61.

on the semanticist than on the pragmaticist to give an explanation of semantic underdeterminacy.²⁴

Moreover, Cappelen & Lepore, together with Borg, are defenders of semantic minimalism. A general thesis covering both their somewhat different approaches can be given as

M(inimalism): Indexical-free declarative sentences (Borg), *or*, all sentences, including those containing context-sensitive expressions that are to be found *only* in a Kaplanian basic set (C&L), *determine full propositions*, or if you like, a truth-conditional content, without the need of pragmatic enrichment of any sort except that needed for the basic set expressions

This captures in a general way what my chosen semanticists in the debate are committed to. Their motivations, however, are for present purposes more interesting than the arguments that fall out of them.

The central motivation guiding Cappelen & Lepore's formal semantics is that they think the lack of one such theory would lead one into contextualism, a thesis they see as incoherent.²⁵ They do not in fact have any arguments for *how* one could decide on a sentence being propositional or not, but rather stipulate it. Part of Borg's motivation rests on the optimism that "the search for a systematic theory (...) could account for the compositionality of natural language, which in turn is required to account for the productivity and systematicity of linguistic comprehension".²⁶ The assumption underlying that motivation stands in direct opposition with what I referred to as Bach's claim: A semantic theory for a natural language could be compositional without being truth-conditional.²⁷ The motivation from compositionality is also Davidson's *central* motivation in providing a theory of meaning, as I will argue below.

Where does Jason Stanley find his place in the semantic camp? He is usefully contrasted with Recanati's account of TCP. Stanley claims that all extra-linguistic influences on the semantic proposition expressed are mandated by the linguistic elements in the sentence

²⁴ It is a very fascinating aspect of the debate over the semantic and pragmatic determinants of natural language meaning that no one, to my knowledge, has made sense of what are sufficient conditions for deeming something a complete proposition, while many nevertheless make their theories dependent upon propositionality.

²⁵ Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore, "Précis of *Insensitive Semantics*", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, no 2 (September 2006), 425.

²⁶ Emma Borg, "Minimalism versus Contextualism in Semantics," Draft of 2006 (University of Reading, http://www.reading.ac.uk/AcaDepts/ld/Philos/borg/Minimalism%20vs%20Contextualism%20in%20Semantics_2.doc (accessed February 22, 2011)), 18n32.

²⁷ It seems promising to assess Bach's claim here. I assume he has a positive account of such a theory, but it is one of the issues I will have to leave out.

used to express the (assertative) proposition.²⁸ The logical form of a sentence, he says, denotes its “real” structure, a structure that is hidden and sometimes distinct from the surface structure, but that empirical studies may discover.

I have not emphasized what surely must be clear disagreements among the mentioned formalists, as I did not do in the case of the contextualists either. What I wanted to do was to provide a broad-stroke characterization of the basic commitments of central participants in the semantics-pragmatics debate, to locate some of their key differences, and begin cautiously to situate Davidson in this debate. Before we can consider how Davidson would fit into the semantics-pragmatics interface, we need to delve into his views in the philosophy of language. This is usefully done in two parts, where one looks at his theory of meaning and his theory of interpretation (somewhat) independently.

Part 1 of this thesis deals with the Davidsonian programme. I will especially make use of Ernie Lepore & Kirk Ludwig’s *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*²⁹ to this end.

²⁸ Jason Stanley, “Context and Logical Form,” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 23, no 4 (2000), 396.

²⁹ Ernie Lepore and Kirk Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, Reprint 2010 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

PART 1

I propose what seems to me clearly to be a necessary feature of a learnable language: it must be possible to give a constructive account of the meaning of the sentences in the language.³⁰

2. The Semantic Programme

This chapter lays out what I at this point assume to be a well established and well developed theory about how we can think about a theory of meaning. It focuses on how a theory of truth is meant to serve as a theory of meaning, and why such a theory is needed. I will shortly turn to the latter issue, before I go on to present Davidson's theory of meaning.

However, first it is worth asking why Davidson proposes that truth can aid us in what is to be a theory of meaning. Why not adhere to meanings? The answer comes from the appreciation that natural languages are *compositional*. Davidson's learnability argument is meant to bring out that since language is learnable, a theory about it must reflect how it is that natural languages can produce an infinite amount of non-synonymous sentences on the basis of finite resources. Language users are finite beings, yet we can understand and produce an infinite amount of utterances. Thus, natural languages are arguably compositional; semantical primitives (roughly, words) are the finite building blocks of the infinite semantical complexes (roughly, sentences). Recursive devices show this productivity. Such a device can reproduce new (parts of) sentences *ad infinitum*. Take 'and' for instance. The sentence "Cats are fond of milk" can be combined with another sentence "Cat owners are sympathetic people" by connecting them with 'and'. The resulting sentence "Cats are fond of milk and cat owners are sympathetic people" is a new sentence, the meaning of which depends on the meaning of its combined parts (e.g. sentences). 'Because', 'or', 'not' and 'if' are other recursive devices which can produce new compound sentences without end, out of combining atomic sentences together with truth-functional sentential connectives. Moreover, one can also show the recursiveness in language with sub-sentential parts, such as "The ancestors of x": "The ancestors of Donald" refers to Donald's ancestors, but we could carry this on indefinitely by applying the function to that expression again, yielding "The ancestors of the ancestors of Donald", referring to another set of ancestors. To embrace this recursive phenomenon one must present a constructive account of language. Criticism is aimed at the traditional Fregean

³⁰ Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages," 3.

approaches to meanings as entities, by arguing that they cannot account for this compositionality. This accountability is for Davidson a general condition for any theory of meaning. It is therefore worth emphasizing this critique, since it is a major motivation for Davidson in pursuit of an alternative account.

There are several arguments for the inutility of reifying meanings, where some appeal to the *insufficiency* and some to the *non-necessity* of such an ontology. In what follows I will merely present one of the arguments for why the appeal to intensional meanings is insufficient, as it is interpreted by Ernie Lepore & Kirk Ludwig (henceforth L&L). I will briefly mention a second argument.

In “Truth and Meaning” Davidson shows that in assigning meanings to ‘Theaetetus’ and ‘flies’ in “Theaetetus flies” you seem to be in need of answering the question of *how you combine* these semantic parts in order to reach the meaning of the whole. Let ‘Theaetetus’ refer to *Theaetetus* and the predicate ‘flies’ refer to the function which subordinates the things that fly into its extension. If you understand the referring expression and the predicate expression, then do you also understand the combined subject-predicate expression? That is, does knowing the referents of these two expressions supply you with knowledge of the complex expression? The answer, Davidson says, is negative. This is, on one side, an aspect of the problem of determining “the unity of the proposition” as Davidson calls it, and it is something he battles with in his latest publication, *Truth and Predication*.³¹ A kindred problem is that of answering how parts combine to form new wholes, which we need to answer given Davidson’s compositionality condition on theories of meaning. This latter is our main area of interest here, so let me illustrate this with another example.

How do we determine the meaning of the complex, “Brutus killed Caesar”? You could start with assigning meaning to the parts, for instance *Brutus* to ‘Brutus’, *Caesar* to ‘Caesar’ and the action of *killing* to ‘killed’. So how do you combine these three meanings in order to reach the meaning of the whole? You could propose to introduce thematic roles; the agent role in the case of ‘kill’ to the referring expression to the left of the predicate, the subject which is doing the killing; and the patient role to the right of the predicate, that which the agent acts upon. But then you have even more meanings that need to be combined in order to reach the whole. How should one *compose* these elements? Could we introduce an additional meaning, something which could bind it all together? No, there seems to be no overarching semantic fact of the matter. The problem is similar to what has been called Plato’s “Third Man

³¹ Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

Argument”.³² If men, the Many, all partake in the One, Man, then one can ask: In virtue of what do the Many, men, partake in the One, man? In other words, how do you subsume many entities under one form, without at the same time having to say how the one form and the many entities *together* form a whole? Do you need to introduce an additional “wholeness”? If so, once more, how do you subsume the Form, the Many, and the wholeness under one? You are led into an infinite regress, and this is arguably what Davidson is trying to show as a faulty aspect of Fregean meanings as entities. Such theories cannot account for how the parts go into combining a whole simply in virtue of its parts.

Another difficulty with reifying meanings, is that while such an account introduces reference to meanings in order to bypass problems with intensional contexts, these references to meaning do no job in accounting for the concept of meaning. If we show how “Brutus killed Caesar” refers to the meaning of *Brutus killed Caesar*, we are no better off in illuminating the concept of meaning. In pairing an object language sentence with a metalanguage sentence, as in ‘s’ refers to the meaning of *m*, what we need to show is *how* we are able to pair the two sentences. It is our pre-understanding of the expression that the object language sentence is paired with that does the job in pairing, but how can we illuminate this pairing? It is here that truth enters the scene.

2i. A Theory of Truth as a Theory of Meaning

Davidson said that “only in the context of [a] language does a sentence (and therefore a word) have meaning”,³³ and by that he commits himself to both (a variant of) semantic holism and hence to the requirement that a theory of meaning must give the meaning of all possible sentences (in a particular language).³⁴ One candidate for the job of providing an adequate theory of meaning to this end is Tarski’s semantic theory of truth, that is, his method for defining truth (for a particular language). Although Tarski was pessimistic about the possibility of a theory of truth for other than formalized languages, Davidson hoped otherwise.

What we want is to give the meaning of a sentence *s* in the object language we are studying (on the basis of its component parts, which I will return to). This can be given by a

³² Samuel Rickless, “Plato’s *Parmenides*” (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), editor Edward N. Zalta <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/plato-parmenides> (accessed April 24 2011)).

³³ Davidson, “Truth and Meaning,” 22.

³⁴ Davidson has changed this view to some degree. He does not mean to say that to give the meaning of *a* sentence depends on giving the meaning of *all* sentences, only that the meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of *other* sentences. See Donald Davidson, “Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore,” in *Reflecting Davidson: Donald Davidson Responding to an International Forum of Philosophers*, ed. Ralf Stoecker (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 80n.

matching sentence p if the metalanguage is the same as the object language, or a translation of s if not. The question then is how do we match (or translate) a sentence without referring to meanings in the intensional manner of “ s means that”, something we stated was not sufficient. Davidson’s proposal is to treat the predicate “is T ” following s *extensionally*, placing necessary restrictions on it, and connecting it with the metalanguage sentence with the material biconditional. It is here that Tarski’s definition of truth enters the discussion.

Tarski set out to give a definition of truth from the perspective of the classical conception of truth from Aristotle: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true”.³⁵ What is the relation between what you say on one hand, and that which is some way or another in a world, on the other? Or put in another manner, what is the relation between s and p ? It is one of *equivalence* - a Tarskian biconditional, or an instance of *schema T* as Davidson calls it:

(T) s is T if and only if p

For this to be a *materially adequate* definition of the truth predicate for a particular language, as Tarski sought, the extension of “is T ” must cover *all* the true sentences in a language L in conformity with schema T. The reason is that each instance of schema T is only a partial definition of truth, and we want the truth predicate’s extension to cover all instances of “is T ” (which amounts to infinitely many sentences given that language is productive in the way we have said). This restriction on the truth predicate is coined *Convention T*, and secures an extensionally correct predication.

How does truth relate to meaning when we substitute the predicate “means that” with the adequately defined predicate “is T ”? Instances of schema T, so-called T-sentences, state the necessary and sufficient conditions, in p , for s to be true. Stating these conditions says something about what the world has to be like, hence the extensionalist proposal. Saying what something must be like for s to be true, i.e. stating the truth conditions, is a way of saying what that sentence means, as in the following instance:

(T-sentence) ‘Snow is white’ (s) is true iff snow is white (p)

Here we *mention* the sentence in the object language of study, predicate the truth of it, and state the conditions for determining its value in connecting it with the *usage* of a

³⁵ Alfred Tarski, “The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics,” in *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., ed A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 86.

metalanguage sentence. If the metalanguage is different from the object language, then we might have a T-sentence like the following:

(T-sentence) ‘Snøen er hvit’ is true iff snow is white

This information would be valuable to someone ignorant of the meaning of the mentioned sentence, and shows why T-sentences are not banal. Of course, schema T must be relativized to times and speakers, since the same sentence can mean different things depending on these - among perhaps other - parameters. The context of utterance matters, a clear case being indexical expressions. Therefore we could present a variant of schema T that would take into account such widely accepted indexicality, yielding Tc:

(Tc) For any speaker S, time t , s for S at t is true iff p

If you say of a sentence then, as uttered by a speaker at a particular time and place, what this sentence requires of a possible or actual world to be true, then you have arguably said what that sentence means in that language. Here we have a straightforward way of matching or pairing a sentence in the language we are studying with a metalanguage sentence, without reifying meanings. Truth is, moreover, a powerful tool for Davidson in other regards also, as we will see in chapter three.

Besides applying a definition of truth in explaining meaning, I said that Davidson required of any theory of meaning that it could account for compositionality. What he initially set forth in “Truth and Meaning” was precisely an attempt to provide a compositional theory that would show how the meaning of sentences depended on the meaning of its constitutive parts. In that brief discussion he had the luxury of using the meaning of the parts. He used “the father of” in building the complex expression “the father of Annette” in order to show how one could account for recursiveness (without introducing meanings). An instructive division drawn by L&L contrasts this initial project with an extended project.³⁶ In the extended project we would like to say something about how we are to understand meaning in language at all. In such an inquiry we would go beyond solely compositional issues of how parts combine to form a whole; now we would want to ask how parts or wholes come to have

³⁶ Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, 74-75.

meaning in the first place. I will confine myself to a brief discussion of the former at this point, and come back to the extended project in more detail later.

The finite amount of elements referred to in the learnability argument as *semantical primitives*, is given in sets of axioms.³⁷ These sets include referring terms, predicates, connectives, and relevant rules of inference. A language user can construct semantical complexes, i.e. sentences, out of the semantical primitives which are defined by the axioms. What these axioms might look like, and how one could combine elements in accord with these, are questions that lead beyond the scope of this discussion. The important thing for us is that the workload for the theory of truth lies in “relating the known truth conditions of each sentence to those aspects (‘words’) of the sentence that recur in other sentences, and can be assigned identical roles in other sentences”.³⁸ Let me exemplify this. If we take for granted that we know what the semantical primitive (of the all too familiar) ‘snow’ means, then we could show how that primitive affects the truth conditions of all the complexes in which it occurs. Darrell Wheeler presents a clear example:

Take as illustrations the following sentences: ‘Snow is white’, ‘If clouds are white, snow is the same color as clouds’, and ‘Snow is cold’; if the word ‘snow’ is replaced in each of these sentences with the word ‘rain’, the first two sentences, which are true of snow, become false, while the third sentence is sometimes true and sometimes false; yet, it is always true of snow.³⁹

A multitude of sentences of this sort would, in an informal way, shed light on the role different words play in the sentences in which they occur, and this would at the same time be revealing as to how sentences depend on their parts for their meaning. This was the initial task Davidson set forth to show how a language can be said to be learnable.

We could also show this in a formal manner. Let us define two base clauses, and two recursion clauses, in order to show how these can produce infinitely many non-synonymous sentences, while preserving truth. I will follow Michael Glanzberg’s simple illustration, and use ‘or’ and ‘¬’ as the recursive devices, and two simple sentences (ϕ and ψ) as the base clauses.⁴⁰

³⁷ According to Davidson, an expression is “a semantical primitive provided the rules which give the meaning for the sentence in which it does not appear do not suffice to determine the meaning of the sentences in which it does appear”. Davidson, “Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages,” 9.

³⁸ Davidson, “Truth and Meaning,” 25.

³⁹ Darrell Wheeler, *On Davidson* (CA, USA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2003), 4.

⁴⁰ Michael Glanzberg, “Truth” (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2009 Edition), editor Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/truth/>. (accessed April 22, 2011))

1. Base clauses

1. 'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white.
2. 'Grass is green' is true iff grass is green.

2. Recursion clauses. For any sentence ϕ and ψ

1. $[\phi \text{ or } \psi]$ is true iff (ϕ is true or ψ is true).
2. $[\neg \phi]$ is true iff it is not the case that ϕ is true.

With these two base clauses we could produce infinitely many complex sentences, the truth values of which would be dependent on the simple sentences, by combining them with the recursion clauses.

To understand what L&L call the extended project demands of us a thorough explication of Davidson's particular method in approaching the concept of meaning. Davidson views meaning, and the intertwined concept of belief, as *holistic* concepts, and this view is connected to his theory of interpretation (and in fact is constituted by it). I will now turn to a discussion of this theory of interpretation which will conclude part one of this thesis.

*in interpreting utterances from
scratch – in radical interpretation – we
must somehow deliver simultaneously a
theory of belief and a theory of meaning.*⁴¹

3. Davidson's Methodological Stance

Davidson's methodological approach is important, in fact, L&L argue that it is his most fundamental assumption. It is

the assumption that the third person stance, as embodied by the stance of the radical interpreter, is conceptually basic in understanding meaning and psychological attitudes [e.g. beliefs]. (;) If the third person perspective is primary, we cannot have (or think of ourselves as having) a first person perspective on our own thoughts, except in so far as we already have (or think of ourselves as having) a perspective on a public world shared with others.⁴²

If a shared, public world is a condition for having language, thoughts, and beliefs, then the constitutive interpersonal aspect of the subject seems to present a departure from ordinary Cartesian conceptions on the relationship between the individual and the world. L&L present a number of interesting discussions accompanying the quote, but we will have to constrain our discussion of the third person stance to a certain degree. Still, the present sections will bring us into Davidson's views on the nature of thought and language. To begin with, it is necessary to say quite a bit about the particular methodological stance, how Davidson construes it, and what might be some of the problems with it.

3i. Radical Interpretation

The perspective from where an inquiry into how one could understand meaning in natural languages, is, for Davidson, the perspective of what he calls *the radical interpreter*. (Originates from Quine's radical translation, and is kindred to this artificial epistemic position). The purpose of radical interpretation is to show what one could know that would put one in a position to interpret utterances, and how one could come to know such a thing. The first question is one concerning a theory of meaning, while the second asks a quasi-empirical question of how one could come to know such a theory.

What conditions are placed on the epistemic position of the radical interpreter (henceforth the RI)? In proposing what is to be a theory of meaning, one must abstain from making use of the concept one wishes to illuminate, Davidson argues. This seems like a fair

⁴¹ Donald Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning," 1974, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 144.

⁴² Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, 387; *Ibid.*, 387n.

approach to the question about what meaning is: If you wish to understand a concept, it could be a source of confusion and circularity to make use of the concept in explaining the one which you are trying to understand. Consequently, the RI should have no knowledge of the meaning of the utterances she is to interpret.

Furthermore, one must appreciate that Davidson views (the interpretation of) meaning and belief as *interdependent*. This entails that one cannot reach the beliefs of an agent without interpreted utterances, because we would have no way of identifying his (fine-grained) beliefs without knowing what his utterances mean. That is, how could he communicate to us a belief *q*, and be sure that we recognize his belief *q*, and not another belief *p*, if he could not use language to express the belief that *q* (and not *p*)? Would we even have any reason to attribute a belief to him? On the basis of what? We would naturally turn to the interpretation of behavior, but a particular action in and of itself can give rise to various, incompatible interpretations. Likewise the other way around; we would have no way of understanding uninterpreted utterances without knowing what the speaker believes that these utterances mean, because part of what constitutes what an utterance means is what the utterer takes it to mean. Thus, there is a circle of meaning and belief that seems difficult to break into from the standpoint of the RI.

We saw in chapter two what could serve as a theory of meaning, so we have addressed one of the initial questions of radical interpretation of what one could know that would put one in a position to interpret utterances. What we did not do, was to ask the question of how one could come to know such a theory from the standpoint of the RI.

The interdependence of meaning and belief excludes appealing to either of these two concepts as separate and independent variables, so what is to serve as our evidential platform for a theory of interpretation? The actions of the speakers seem to be all that is left for an interpreter who does not know the language she is to interpret, or the beliefs the speakers hold. What we must do then, is bridge the gap between behavior (i.e. the relevant speech actions) and what that behavior is evidence for (i.e. meaning and belief). Except, in the case of behavior we come up against yet another interdependence relation: that between *desire* and *belief*. An agent performs an action *A* because of what he desires (the object of the action), and what he believes will be a way to achieve this goal. Additionally, actions are guided by reason, in such a way that the “belief and desire that explain an action must be such that

anyone who had the belief and desire would have a reason to act in that way”.⁴³ The problem is that desire and belief cannot, similar to the interdependence of meaning and belief, be separated from the viewpoint of the RI. An action *A* may be describable in more than one way when we do not know what the agent is trying to do, and how he thinks this can be achieved. So where do we go from here? How can the project of radical interpretation even get up on its feet and going?

An initial part of the solution lies in confirming a theory of meaning for the speaker through the verification of the truth of T-sentences. If we knew that a T-sentence such as “‘Snow is white’ (*s*) is true iff snow is white (*p*)” were true under a certain circumstance, then we would have reason to believe that we could break into the circle of meaning and belief. The reason for this is that a speaker says *s* both because of what he takes the sentence to mean, but also because of what he believes about the world.⁴⁴ If we knew what *s* means, we would also know what the speaker believed in uttering it. However, at this point we meet several problems. How could we know that the speaker thinks he says something true about the world? How, in other words, do we know that the attitude toward the sentence uttered is one of truth and not falsity (or neither)? If we had evidence that speakers, as a matter of fact, held most (declarative) sentences uttered to be true, then the RI would be on her way to confirm the truth of T-sentences in most of these occurrences. In that case, we would at least be justified in grounding our evidential base in certain attitudes toward sentences. The methodological problem of interpretation aims to “see how, given the sentences a man accepts as true under given circumstances, to work out what his beliefs are and what his words mean”.⁴⁵ Except, even if we had an argument for why this attitude of holding true should be a fact about speakers, a second problem emerges. Why should a sentence *held* true in fact *be* true? If we plan on using the attitude toward the sentence in given utterance situations as evidence for the truth of T-sentences, then we must be sure that the speaker is in fact holding true attitudes, and not merely believing he is. I will continue by presenting an answer to this latter problem. In the course of that discussion, the reason for believing that a speaker holds most (declarative) sentences to be true, an answer to the first of these two questions, will present itself.

⁴³ Donald Davidson, “Thought and Talk,” 1975, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 159.

⁴⁴ Davidson, “Belief and the Basis of Meaning,” 142.

⁴⁵ Davidson, “Thought and Talk,” 162.

What then takes us from the speakers' *hold-true attitudes*⁴⁶ in certain utterance circumstances toward the uninterpreted 'it snows', and to the confirmation of the truth of the T-sentence "For any speaker S, time *t*, 'it snows' for S at *t* is true iff it snows"? That is, how can we confirm the truth of the T-sentence by knowing no more than that – at the time of utterance, in the vicinity of the speech act – the speakers take it to be true? And why, one might ask, must it *in fact* be true, and not simply *be taken as* true by the speaker? Why could it not be sufficient that a number of speakers thought they had true beliefs about the world? Could not this suffice for interpretation to be successful? If we wish to maintain a metaphysical realism, then we want truth to be independent of what one or more individuals believe to be true. We want objective truth. So, what we had to do was to confirm the truth of T-sentences so that our Tarski-style theory of meaning can be used as a theory of interpretation. Our empirical evidence for such a theory is founded on hold-true attitudes. We have not been given any reason to suppose that the fact that a speaker holds a sentence *s* to be true actually indicates that sentence *being* true (in all the truthful utterances of it), because particular speakers may be wrong at times about what is true. They may be reasonable in believing that *p*, but it may be the case that not-*p*. Let me then turn to how Davidson solves the problem of getting from "believing to be true" to "being true".

3ii. The Concept of Belief

A hold-true attitude toward a sentence, we said, is an attitude that is constituted of two factors: what the speaker believes about the world, and what the sentence means.⁴⁷ We could not use the sentence uttered as proof about its meaning *per se*, and thus address the methodological problem. Could we make use of what the speaker believes in uttering the sentence? Not directly, but via a major methodological assumption. This is the general claim that speakers are, along with interpreters, *rational* agents. If you wish to question whether the hold-true attitudes are in fact true or false, settling that matter can only be done on an *already present background* of general agreement:

widespread agreement is the only possible background against which disputes and mistakes can be interpreted. Making sense of the utterances and behaviour of others, even their most aberrant behaviour,

⁴⁶ Are we not alluding to what the speakers *believe* in talking about attitudes, a luxury we did not have? No, Davidson replies, a *hold true attitude* is "a single attitude applicable to all sentences, and so does not ask us to be able to make finely discriminated distinctions among beliefs". Donald Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," 1973, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135.

⁴⁷ Davidson, "Thought and Talk," 167; Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning," 142.

requires us to find a great deal of reason and truth in them. To see too much unreason on the part of others is simply to undermine our ability to understand what it is they are so unreasonable about.⁴⁸

This quotation touches upon the governing *principle of charity*, a principle Davidson needs if he wants to break into the circle of meaning and belief via the evidential basis of hold-true attitudes. What the principle says is (as is commonly said) not so easy to pin-point. One good way of stating it is simply to say that the interpretee has more or less *the same beliefs* as the interpreter, and that those beliefs are *largely true* (the latter claim due to an argument from the impossibility of massive error (discussed below)). The RI can rely on the assumption that the interpretee holds most beliefs about the world to be true in the sense that

if we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything.⁴⁹

By alluding to a principle of charity, Davidson's RI can hold belief steady while solving for meaning. By holding belief steady with the help of charity, I mean two things:

One, it is assumed that we are attuned to the same salient events or objects in our environment, that is, we are in agreement about what is going on in our surroundings. The RI needs to draw on this assumption in interpreting an utterance. If we take the utterance "it snows" to be interpretable, the interpreter must in one way or another have reason to believe that the speaker is uttering this sentence in relation to the publicly available event of snowing in the shared environment. In what sense can we justify this assumption? That is, how do we account for the concepts of salience and environment in a philosophical instructive way? The concepts seem to be closely related to the vague idea of a context, and this, we have seen, is again tied up with Davidson's use of 'circumstance'. I will leave this difficulty to rest for the time being, and simply assume that we have a good notion of what salience in an environment is. To some degree the assumption is backed by the rationality aspect implicit in the principle of charity, but it is not to the advantage of the principle not to have independent support given by distinctive arguments.

Two, if the beliefs we are in agreement about are mostly true beliefs, then this would give the truth-functional theory of meaning, issued in T-sentences of the form "For any speaker S, time *t*, 'it snows' for S at *t* is true iff it snows", a pair of legs to stand on. What we needed for our theory of interpretation to work, remember, was to be able to confirm the truth

⁴⁸ Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning," 153.

⁴⁹ Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," 137.

of T-sentences from the standpoint of the RI. This was the quasi-epistemological issue of the project of radical interpretation. If it was not the case that the speaker held a true belief about the world, e.g. that it snows, then the theory of meaning given via the concept of truth would not be fit to serve as a theory of interpretation because it would not be grounded in truth, but only in beliefs about truthfulness. So what support can be lent to Davidson's claim that the concept of belief is of such a kind that one could not fail to have mostly true beliefs?

The argument from the impossibility of massive error is meant to bring out that we could only locate false beliefs in a pattern of largely true beliefs. Davidson presents a version of the argument when he says that

Error is what gives belief its point. We can (...) take it as given that *most* beliefs are correct. The reason for this is that a belief is identified by its location in a pattern of beliefs; it is this pattern that determines the subject matter of a belief, what the belief is about. Before some object in, or aspect of, the world can become part of the subject matter of a belief (true or false) there must be endless true beliefs about the subject matter. False beliefs tend to undermine the identification of the subject matter.⁵⁰

On one hand, Davidson claims that beliefs as such must be understood inside the pattern which they are a part of. Since this pattern is more or less made up of beliefs that fit coherently together, then it would be of great help to the interpreter who is also coherent in her beliefs. She can assume that if the speaker believes *q*, then he probably believes *p* as well. More importantly, Davidson claims that this pattern must consist of largely true beliefs. Why must they be largely true? Consider two different worlds. The first is a world where all our beliefs are true. The second is a world where all our beliefs are false. What role would belief play in such worlds? If all our beliefs were true, why believe anything? There is not anything to believe in a world where there is no possibility of error. The same is the case for the second world. Since all our beliefs are false, then what point is there to falsity? Falsity as contrasted with what? The distinction between truth and falsity is *what gives belief its point*. As Davidson writes, "the concept of belief (...) stands ready to take up the slack between objective truth and the held true, and we come to understand it just in this connection."⁵¹ Additionally we could assume that there are more true beliefs than false beliefs, the reason being that too many false beliefs "simply blur the focus".⁵²

On the other hand, the quote from Davidson lays claim to a holistic nature of beliefs, or more precisely, to psychological attitudes in general, when he says that the pattern is what

⁵⁰ Davidson, "Thought and Talk," 168.

⁵¹ Ibid., 170.

⁵² The argument for why it must be most and not a few, is unclear. We might back it up by Davidson's assumption of widespread agreement as I quoted above. That assumption, of course, also stands in need of justification.

determines the psychological attitudes. The holistic nature, or the interlocking of beliefs, is also illustrated by one of Davidson's examples:

Beliefs are identified and described only within a dense pattern of beliefs. I can believe a cloud is passing before the sun, but only because I believe there is a sun, that clouds are made of water vapour, that water can exist in liquid or gaseous form; and so on, without end.⁵³

This pattern would again fit (logically) into the totality of beliefs (for that person), each one being to different degrees constitutive of the others, and as itself constituted of these others. Therein lies the holism of beliefs. We should also mention to what degree this holism is present in Davidson's view. The third person perspective of the RI is taken in order to best illuminate the concept of belief (and meaning). As such, the holistic approach undertaken is a methodological issue, but it is also thought to reflect how the concept of belief (and meaning) is *constituted* by the third person perspective via the *attribution* of beliefs to a speaker, and thus as being constitutively holistic, and not merely a preferred methodological stance on Davidson's behalf.⁵⁴ Moreover, belief is said to be fundamental for attributing psychological, or propositional, attitudes in general, such as 'desire that *p*', 'hope that *p*' and 'think that *p*', the reason being that if you desire or hope or think that tomorrow will be a better day, then you must believe that there is a thing like tomorrow, and that this is something that could be a better day. We may say that propositional attitudes share propositional content. What is more, propositions determine – by their nature – logical relations among their content, so the amount of interlocking beliefs go on "without end". Not in the sense that the amount of beliefs is a countable amount, but that each belief could lead you into a multitude of directions, all of which would seem to be endless. One does of course not need to entertain all the possible propositions that follow from a particular one, but one could agree on the consequences of holding a particular proposition to be true. In other words, we are all rational beings.

The holistic claim that beliefs are constituted by the pattern in which they fit into, have up to this point only been suggestive, and thus the claim seems somewhat unsupported. I will try to present some grounds for accepting it.

The anchoring point for the holistic claim of constitutiveness is that beliefs are *only available through interpretation*. This was already hinted at when we introduced the circle of meaning and belief. Here we could not make sense of the beliefs of the speaker without at the

⁵³ Donald Davidson, "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics," 1977, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 200.

⁵⁴ Jeff Malpas, *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning: Holism, Truth, Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 54.

same time making sense of the meaning of his utterances. Furthermore, it is only against a background of an endless amount of true beliefs that the RI *can* succeed in interpreting a speaker, that is, by support of the principle of charity. We remember that this principle seeks to establish the speaker as a rational being in the sense that he is coherent in his true beliefs about the world, and that he holds the sentences he utters to be for the most part true. But how could we say of beliefs that they are available *only* through (the interpretation of) language, or more importantly, as constituted by this implicitly holistic availability? Why should the perspective of the RI, and the conditions that would make this project successful, be illuminative of the concept of belief?

We started this chapter with a quote from L&L. They took Davidson's most fundamental assumption to be that "we cannot have (...) a first person perspective on our own thoughts, except in so far as we already have (...) a perspective on a public world shared with others"⁵⁵ If the concept of belief is conceptually basic as seen from the third person perspective of the RI, then the holistic claim about constitutiveness could become more plausible. To say that something is conceptually basic (from a particular stance) is to say something about the nature of the concept. And the nature of the concept of belief is arguably one which is dependent on an interpersonal structure. Our beliefs about the world spring out from the (language) practices we share, so we would not have beliefs without the possibility of someone being able to interpret us, and this interpretation, we remember, is dependent on language. Why should we accept this? Let me make a detour via Davidson's talk of the relation between thought and language.

In "Thought and Talk", Davidson set out to argue for the somewhat more extensive thesis that one cannot have thoughts unless one is an interpreter of another speaker. What does Davidson say about thoughts? A thought is something that we attribute to someone by means of propositional attitudes. Such attitudes state a specific psychological attitude toward some content expressed in the proposition, the propositional content. Davidson talks about the concept of a thought in a manner that focuses on how we can *attribute* thoughts. How we in fact attribute thoughts is then arguably illuminating for what thoughts are, or at least considerably so. Davidson writes:

We attribute a thought to a creature whenever we assertively employ a positive sentence the main verb of which is psychological [i.e. propositional attitudes] (...) I do not take for granted that if a creature has

⁵⁵ Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, 387n.

a thought, then we can [by means of propositional attitudes] correctly attribute that thought to him. *But thoughts so attributable at least constitute a good sample of the totality.*⁵⁶

We remember that belief is what is common to all such propositional attitudes given in their content, so belief is *ipso facto* fundamental to thought. The concept of a thought remains nonetheless somewhat mysterious. The way L&L talk about thoughts is simply by more or less *equating* thoughts with propositional attitudes. This does not say much about what thoughts are, and Davidson does no better when he writes, brief and condense, that the particular relation between thought and belief is that “a thought is defined by a system of beliefs, but is itself autonomous with respect to beliefs”.⁵⁷ It is not all that clear what kind of relation this is. But what seems to be clear is that both thoughts and other psychological attitudes (the latter subsumed under beliefs) share the same propositional content. What also seems to follow from this obscure relation is that you would not be able to identify thoughts without beliefs, so there is a considerable dependence relation of thought on belief. Davidson does not seem to draw further distinctions that would be of importance to the following argument for why we cannot have thoughts without language.⁵⁸

We remember that the anchoring point that stands in need of explanation is that beliefs are only available through the interpretation of the speech of others, and as constituted by this availability. Is belief, then, only made possible through language? The emerging point is that beliefs, as we said, are given their point by error, or falsity. Beliefs require as a possibility that they can be false, they require that you have *the concept of error*. If you did not entertain the possibility that some of your beliefs are false, then do you really believe anything? (Remember the world where all your beliefs were true. The concept of belief suggested itself to be superfluous in such a world.) So if we accept the claim that error is what gives belief its point, then the discussion seems to boil down to how we should understand the concept of error. This is made important, again, by the distinction between a sentence held true and a sentence in fact being true, as it was with the confirmation of the truth of T-sentences. In the concluding remarks in “Thought and Talk” Davidson writes that “the concepts of objective truth, and of error, necessarily emerge in the context of interpretation. The distinction between a sentence being held true and being in fact true is essential to (...) communication.”⁵⁹ What grounds does Davidson give us then for the claim that we need to be in communication for the

⁵⁶ Davidson, “Thought and Talk,” 156 (my italics).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁸ It is regrettably beyond the scope of this essay to survey the claim that thoughts are the same as propositional content.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 169-170.

concept of truth to emerge, or to have application? It is only in communication that we can adjust what we believe about the world, and understand our own relation to other objects and individuals in it. Through what Davidson calls *triangulation* we can see how it takes two individuals to identify perceptions of *a world* from the perspective of the perceiver, as contrasted with perceptions that do not “discriminate between stimuli at the sensory surfaces or somewhere further out, or further in”.⁶⁰ What communication does is to establish an agreement about what one perceives, so that there is something outside of oneself. This is contrasted with what might not be thought to be independent of oneself had one been “bolted to the earth, (...) [with] no way of determining the distance from me of many objects”.⁶¹ It is only in communication, then, that we can adjust ourselves relative to a world, independent of ourselves. It is further only by the existence of such a shared world that belief has application, for the reason that it is only in virtue of a shared, objective world one could be wrong about anything. From this the concept of error (and hence of thought and belief) emerges.

Preliminary Remarks

What I have presented in part one of this thesis, after I gave a characterization of the semantics-pragmatics distinction, is Davidson’s endeavors in the philosophy of language. The project of radical interpretation takes centre place, since it is here the theory of meaning – given in terms of the definition of truth from Tarski – is to be confirmed. I showed how such a theory of truth is meant to do duty as a theory of meaning by offering a way of illuminating the pairing of object language sentences with metalanguage sentences. I also briefly discussed part of what motivated Davidson to present this new approach to the understanding of meaning in natural languages. Compositionality was here the central engine, fuelled by the learnability argument.

We saw how the RI was confronted with several problems in confirming a theory of truth for a speaker. In order to confirm such a theory she had to break into the circle of (the holistic concepts of) meaning and belief. The hold-true attitudes toward utterances – under specified circumstances – became the evidential basis for the RI. However, the attitudes themselves were not immediately sufficient grounds for interpretation. Due to the need for true beliefs in confirming a theory of truth, we had to argue for why we could assume that

⁶⁰ Donald Davidson, “Three Varieties of Knowledge,” 1991, in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Reprint 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 212.

⁶¹ Donald Davidson, “Rational Animals,” 1982, in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Reprint 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

speakers held such true beliefs. It is here that the principle of charity is given. This is also the main motive force behind the project of radical interpretation, as it is this principle that provides the RI with the necessary assumptions of rationality on behalf of the speaker. Together with the holism of belief and meaning, Davidson's radical interpreter is, some would argue, able to interpret alien utterances from scratch.

I pointed out that an argument is found wanting for why the other part of the principle of charity should be accepted. That is, no independent arguments were found for why we could assume agreement about the interpretative circumstances on the part of the interpreter and interpretee. This notwithstanding, I moved on to show how Davidson views the dependence of thought on verbal communication. I did this, in part, to bring forth why Davidson takes the third person perspective as conceptually basic in understanding meaning and belief.

As part one is characterized more by its explicatory nature than by its critical approach, we will see that part two takes on a more in-depth, critical and original suit. We are here to a larger degree on our own, so I will have to make sure that I build a coherent exegesis of Davidson on matters he himself was silent on.

PART II

*I turn now to one more, and very large, fly
in the ointment: the fact that the same sentence
may at one time or in one mouth be true and
at another time or in another mouth be false.⁶²*

4. Davidson and the Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction

To determine what someone said is complicated. What is meant by the words of the agent? If we could determine this semantically, have we then at the same time determined if that is all that was meant by the agent's utterance? Clearly not. Grice and Austin, among others, have shown us that. But how do we account for a distinction between propositions or contents (possibly as expressed through linguistic meaning) on one hand, and the additional propositions expressed pragmatically, so to speak, on the other? In the end, how do we categorize all the different aspects of an utterance onto a semantics-pragmatics distinction? These questions raise the issue of what it is that is expressed in communication, and so one way to formulate the concern would be to ask what the defining criteria for successful communication are.

I now turn to aspects of Davidson's theory of interpretation which are relevant for my purpose of mapping Davidson onto the interface. One of these aspects revolves around what agents mean by their utterances in *particular contexts*, and what distinctions Davidson is willing to draw in this connection. "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" takes centre place in this regard. Before I turn to an explicatory and critical view of that essay, I will have to look at how Davidson deals with the idea of linguistic meaning.

My guiding hypothesis is that Davidson's conception of interpretation involves both semantic and pragmatic elements. Yet, because he is not himself explicit about possible problems posed by the semantics-pragmatics distinction, it will be exegetically fruitful to understand Davidson in light of the interface.

4i. The Determination of Content

One way into this can be reflected by discussing a central quote. Davidson writes that

⁶² Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," 33.

to explain why someone said something we need to know, among other things, his own interpretation of what he said, that is, *what he believes his words mean in the circumstances under which he speaks*. Naturally this will involve some of his beliefs about how others will interpret his words.⁶³

The context in which Davidson writes this, follows from a discussion of the teleological explanation of action and speech. In the case of actions, Davidson draws on Frank Ramsey in showing how the choices an agent makes among different possible actions could be reflected by strength of desire and degree of belief. The task becomes one of showing how one could break into the circle of desire and belief only given the agents' choices. One choice could be reconstructed as different desire-belief pairs, so there lies an underdeterminacy in observing choices alone. The problem is similar for the explanation of speech. Here we would want to break into the circle of meaning and belief by the evidential basis of agents' hold-true attitudes, but the attitudes themselves are not sufficient without the further assumption given in the principle of charity.

Davidson tells us that a theory of speech interpretation should give us "the meaning of an arbitrary utterance by a member of a language community".⁶⁴ But what the theory of interpretation does not do, is tell us *why* the speaker said *p*. It arguably tells us what *p* means, but not why the speaker said *p*. My point of interest here, however, is not Davidson's integration of a theory of action with a theory of meaning, but his claim that a speaker a) has his own interpretation of the meaning of his utterances, and that this involves b) knowledge of the circumstances under which he speaks; those that hold both for the interpretee and the interpreter. The speaker needs to know, then, what the circumstances under which he speaks are, and he needs to assume that he knows how the interpreter perceives these circumstances. In Davidson's words, "knowledge of the circumstances [i.e. the context] under which someone holds sentences true is central to interpretation".⁶⁵

The problem this highlights is undeniably connected with the semantics-pragmatics debate. (It could become clear, however, that it is unfair to Davidson to excerpt these quotes out of the context in which they are discussed (teleological agency). Regardless of that, we need to make sense of what it means that a linguistic agent can, in some sense, determine what is said, or what would be said, by the meaning of her words.) The distinction underlying the semantics-pragmatics debate arose out of the need to contextualize language in order to understand it. But how do we account for the concept of a *circumstance* in a philosophically

⁶³ Davidson, "Thought and Talk," 161 (my italics).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 160-161.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.

instructive way? The reason that this question is important should be clear. If the content of the thought(s) expressed, that is, (sentence and/or speaker) meaning, is dependent on the context of the utterance, then we would want to know what it is about context that helps determine content. In due time I will consider whether we should cash out the concept of a circumstance in other terms, such as knowledge or competencies, or whether we should introduce a richer understanding of circumstance in order to account for the crude characterization of the distinction between sentence meaning and speaker meaning that I gave in chapter one.

It should also be made clear what I mean when I say “the determination of content”. In what sense does an agent *determine* the content of his utterances? That an agent must believe that his words will mean *p* rather than *q*, and that he thinks that the interpreter also takes it to mean *p* and not *q*, is *one* aspect of language that reflects that we can use language to express our intentions. Part of the problem lies in sorting out how we separate semantics (sentence meaning) from pragmatics (speaker meaning) when intentions, that is, what the speaker intends his words to mean, influence *both* sentence meaning and speaker meaning. It is an important aspect of Davidson’s theory of interpretation that we could probably use whichever words we liked as long as they were interpreted the way we wanted them to be interpreted. This is the Gricean element in Davidson, and is reflected in the quote I started out with in this section.

If we could identify different mechanisms underlying the interpretation of sentence meaning, on one side, and speaker meaning on the other, then we have said something substantial about the semantics-pragmatics distinction. Part of the problem is to determine what a sentence means independently of the use of it. How should we approach the semantic part of the distinction when we speak of the determination of content? Davidson’s theory of semantics is his Tarski-style theory of meaning, and the theory is formal. As we saw reflected in his account of natural language, any theory about it must give a formal treatment of every sentence in order to account for compositionality, and it should say of every sentence what a speaker takes that sentence to mean. What makes mapping Davidson onto a semantics-pragmatics distinction difficult, is that he invokes circumstances as essential, both to the particular interpretation of utterances, but also to explain the nature of sentence meaning. What a sentence linguistically means is determined by how linguistic agents hold true attitudes toward them, and what an utterance of a sentence means, is what the speaker takes it

to mean here and now. What is unclear at this point is how the familiar sentence-speaker meaning distinction corresponds to this (yet vague) distinction.

One thing we could do is try to differentiate the concept of a circumstance. We could, to take an example, be clear about two somewhat independent claims:

1) Sentence meaning gets its life from circumstances, understood as *a series of circumstances*, somewhat homogeneously understood, all contributing to the pattern of hold-true attitudes.

2) Intended meaning gets its life from circumstances, understood as *heterogeneous circumstances* that speakers exploit in order to get their intended meaning across.

I will continue to work with the idea of differentiating the concept of a circumstance throughout my discussion, in order to make sense of what seems to be a somewhat unclear aspect of Davidson. I will, however, first like to get a firmer grip on sentence meaning.

4ii. The Problems of Determining Linguistic Meaning

How should we proceed in the case of sentence/linguistic meaning? We want to know in what sense linguistic meaning is determined by the series of circumstances. For one thing, Davidson is an adherent of the (truistic) view that meaning supervenes on use. Sentences mean what they do on the basis of the holistic web which they are part of. Moreover, this web is *constituted by* the hold-true attitudes that the linguistic agents hold toward sentences. (And remember, these attitudes are conditioned by particular and/or general circumstances.) So we have a straightforward answer to what it is that determines linguistic meaning (or content).

But, and this is a big but: A hold-true attitude is an attitude that is constituted by two factors: what the speaker believes about the world, *and what he takes the sentence to mean*. This is, in effect, the vector of meaning and belief. Notice, however, the apparent question-begging here: Sentences mean what they do on the basis of what agents take them to mean. But how could you define sentence meaning in terms of someone's attitude towards it? Are you not presupposing that which you are trying to present independent grounds for? It is clear that Davidson wishes to maintain an "autonomy of meaning" in the sense that a sentence has meaning above just what someone takes it to mean on particular occasions. It is only, Davidson says, because "the interpretation of a sentence is independent of its use that the

utterance of a sentence can serve in the description of the attitudes of others”.⁶⁶ What if we interpreted Davidson’s “takes the sentence to mean” to reflect the idea that the speaker is working with *communicative* intentions, such that the sentence means what it does *relative* to these communicative intentions? From what I have said so far I think we have grounds to believe otherwise. This comes out even clearer when Davidson writes that “language is the instrument it is because the same expression, with semantic features (meaning) *unchanged*, can serve countless purposes.”⁶⁷ This strongly suggests that a sentence means something over and above a particular use of it. However, it is difficult to see at this point how one is to provide explanatory grounds for the definition of sentence meaning in terms of someone’s attitude towards it.

We are inclined to believe, then, that we have *knowledge of* some linguistic meaning, and this is perhaps what Davidson refers to when he says that a speaker takes a sentence to mean something. If it is true that linguistic meaning, or semantics, is in some sense different from particular utterances of sentences, then we can see ourselves as justified in trying to separate semantics from pragmatics, and consider (perhaps) semantics as somewhat “stable”. However, we may have reasons to believe that a concept of stability is very difficult to maintain within a Davidsonian framework, as we will see later on.

So how are we to understand sentence meaning in terms of its independence of use? Two ways to *not* go about answering this, according to Davidson, would be by a) separating meaning from belief, or by b) explaining meaning in terms of non-linguistic beliefs (such as intentions).⁶⁸ We might ask ourselves how we are to exegetically proceed when Davidson in another essay writes that the meanings of words are abstracted away from their role in sentences, in the same way as “the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from *their* part in helping people achieve goals or realize [non-linguistic] intentions”.⁶⁹ As regards the latter approach of explaining meaning in terms of non-linguistic intentions, Davidson does indeed see the “important relations between what a speaker’s words mean and his non-linguistic intentions and beliefs [but has] (...) doubts about the possibility of *defining* linguistic meaning in terms of non-linguistic intentions and beliefs”.⁷⁰ It is still unclear to us then what Davidson would present as a positive account of linguistic meaning beyond the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁷ Donald Davidson, “On Saying That,” 1968, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 108 (my italics).

⁶⁸ Davidson, “Belief and the Basis of Meaning,” 143.

⁶⁹ Donald Davidson, “Reality without Reference,” 1977, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 220.

⁷⁰ Davidson, “Belief and the Basis of Meaning,” 143.

apparent circular account I have presented. He might want to draw a distinction between sentence meaning and utterance meaning (a type/token distinction), but this would still leave open the question of the emergence of meaning, and in addition demand an explanation of a sentence's relation to particular utterances of it.

The preceding discussion in this section boils down to what I take to be circular reasoning. I said that Davidson suggests that linguistic meaning gets its life from the totality of situations in which agents hold true beliefs toward their utterances. The circularity I detect comes into play when one *defines* a hold-true attitude as consisting of what an agent believes about the world in uttering *p* and what he takes the linguistic meaning to express. Davidson is thus apparently begging the question when he makes explanatory use of that which he is trying to explain.

In addition to this problem, we might ask another question, one concerning the interdependence of meaning and belief. If it is only *the interpretation of* meaning and belief that is interdependent from the perspective of the RI, then is it really unreasonable to ask what linguistic meaning is, in and of itself? We remember that, according to Davidson, meaning and belief are conceptually basic as viewed from the third person perspective. Does this entail that *the interdependence of* meaning and belief is conceptually basic as well? I said in chapter three that the interdependence of meaning and belief excludes appealing to either of these two concepts as separate and independent variables *in interpretation*, but I did not say that the interdependence itself was conceptually basic. What this suggests is that we might need to distinguish a metaphysical question from a quasi-epistemic one. Is the interdependence given metaphysically, that is, by the nature of the concepts of meaning and belief, or is it a quasi-epistemological issue, dealt with by a (radical) interpreter? Taking into account that the epistemic position of the RI is seen as a metaphysical one, the questions might not be so easy to separate. If we accept Davidson's construction of the RI, and that this metaphysical position is illuminant of thought and meaning, then it seems that we would need to accept the conceptual basic interdependence as well. Davidson himself is somewhat vague on the subject when he writes that

neither language [i.e. meaning] nor thinking [e.g. belief] can be fully explained in terms of the other, and neither has conceptual priority. The two are, indeed, linked, in the sense that each requires the other

in order to be understood; but the linkage is not so complete that either suffices (...) to explicate the other.⁷¹

This *may* provide additional justification for asking what linguistic meaning is, independent of use. The reason is that there is apparently something about meaning that differentiates it from belief, even though we need the concept of belief to understand meaning, and *vice versa*. What this shows, and what Davidson demands of us, is that we cannot separate meaning from belief, and that we cannot define meaning in terms of belief either.

In addition to that we find yet another couple of Davidsonian assumptions that, on the face of it, may cause trouble for the individuation of linguistic meaning. These are the theses of semantic holism and the indeterminacy of meaning.

Holism about meaning implies that we cannot abstract sentence meanings from their constitutive web (i.e. a “language”) without considering the holistic basis which they are part of. Abstracting sentence meaning is precisely this; abstract it from, and in light of, the pattern in which it is constituted. The indeterminacy about meaning thesis implies that there is no fact of the matter that could give preference to one interpretation theory over another, due to the nature of evidence for the theories; in Davidson’s case, behavioral evidence. The theory of meaning is in this sense indeterminate (as contrasted with the weaker *underdeterminacy* of some theory, where some evidence *could* be given that differentiated two theories). A sentence *S*, then, if indeterminate, will or could be captured equally well by a theory of interpretation that yields *I* as an interpretation of it, as one that yields *I** as an interpretation of it.

Where does all this put us in regard to our initial question about what it is that determines linguistic meaning, how we should identify it, and how to contrast it with particular (speaker influenced) utterances of it? Could we still ask this question in light of the indeterminacy thesis? I think we could. The reason for this is that Davidson would, I think, agree to there being sentence meanings that could be extracted from particular communication instances, but that these sentence meanings could just as well have been constructed differently by an RI, yielding coherent, but incompatible sets of interpretations. The mere fact that there could be alternatives, do not pose, on the face of it, a threat to the idea that it could be given linguistically (however we are to qualify something being linguistic), *and* that it be stable (retaining an autonomy of meaning).

⁷¹ Davidson, “Thought and Talk,” 156. But had the concepts been metaphysically interdependent, then would not this provide grounds to believe that one could, *a priori*, deduce the one concept from the other? But this, we have seen, is denied by Davidson when he says that he has doubts about the possibility of defining one concept in terms of the other.

Could we ask the question in regard to semantic holism? I think this is the more difficult question of the two. It seems as if the pendulum swings from side to side; from the ultimate perspective of the shared world, where Davidson unifies a theory of action with a theory of meaning, and where linguistic meaning originates; and down to the brass tacks where we see that there is something which is, on one hand, of a kind which we call sentence meaning, and on the other hand, something which the agent can mean by an utterance of a sentence with a particular meaning. In fact, this latter distinction is a standard way to characterize the semantics-pragmatics distinction: Pragmatics is about how we go about communicating with each other through language. Semantics is supposed to tell us something about the systematicity and compositionality in the language that we use for these pragmatic purposes.⁷²

I think we need to address the problem as it is presented by semantic holism. Could we find different methods of approaching the issue of the determination of linguistic meaning?

4iii. The Remedy in the Case of Linguistic Meaning

I do not think we have taken seriously the implications of semantic holism. It might be that we are on the outskirts of what analytical philosophy *can* do when explaining the *ultimate* perspective of the world we share as rational and linguistic agents. A theory of linguistic meaning is “an undetachable part of a more general theory of human behavior”,⁷³ Davidson stresses, and this might demand a grander view on meaning than what reductive analysis can offer. Jeff Malpas is central in this regard. He connects his readings of Davidson with both Martin Heidegger and H. G. Gadamer.

In “Analysis and Hermeneutics”⁷⁴ he discusses two different definitional practices; one the reductive analysis, the other the hermeneutical practice. Davidson’s interdependent concepts of meaning and belief may, as I pointed out, be subject to circular reasoning in the case of a reductive analysis in search of determinate linguistic meaning. The remedy might be to equip oneself with a hermeneutical approach, and equally important, be open about the apparent hermeneutical aspect in Davidson.⁷⁵ Malpas quotes Kühl on the problem one comes

⁷² Observe that an often occurring motivation for being a semanticist lies in the systematicity that formal approaches to language offer. Moreover, this also often appears as an argument *against* contextualist approaches. Such arguments, however, seem to be rather inconclusive, as it could just as well turn out that we could say something systematic and general about the pragmatic side of natural languages.

⁷³ Davidson, “Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore,” 84.

⁷⁴ J. E. Malpas, “Analysis and Hermeneutics”, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25, no 2 (1992).

⁷⁵ Heidegger (and Gadamer) and Davidson have on more than one occasion been compared and understood in terms of each other. This is also pointed out by Davidson in Donald Davidson, “The Third Man,” 1992, in *Truth, Language, and History*, Reprint 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

up against in cases like the one just mentioned, and I will quote him in full as well because this is important. In relation to meaning and belief (for our purposes, though Kühl talks about ‘world’), he says that

These concepts are not defined in the good old analytic way. Not one of them appears as the unknown definiendum to the left of an identity sign, with an array of other, and well known, concepts mustered to the right, as the definiens. We find ourselves, in fact, in the quite tricky position of not being able to define the basic (...) terms without sinning against a ground rule of analytic definitional practice, viz. the rule that the term to be defined (...) must not be among the terms that we use to define it, or to explain it with.⁷⁶

What I may have been struggling with then, is the undertaking of analytical reasoning within what might be a hermeneutical circle. (Of course, here our grounds for justifying our exegesis are somewhat shaky since Davidson does not impose a hermeneutical approach, at least not so explicitly. It is nonetheless worth considering briefly, if only to show that it is not far-fetched.) It is a circle implied by holism in the sense that one must understand the parts (i.e. the sentences) in terms of the whole (i.e. the language), *and vice versa*. What adds to the difficulty of understanding these concepts is the way Davidson integrates meaning with belief, another holistic concept. So what we in fact need to deal with is the perspective where meaning and belief – understood holistically – can only be understood within the web they constitute, and this web is the whole human life and its practices, so to speak. How can we map *this* onto a semantics-pragmatics distinction? That we have looked past the apparent hermeneutical aspect of Davidson also becomes clearer still when one looks at the similarities between what Kühl is saying here, and that Davidson says that meaning cannot be fully explained in terms of belief, and vice versa. The concepts are dependent, “in the sense that each requires the other in order to be understood; but the linkage is not so complete that either suffices (...) to explicate the other”.⁷⁷

It is also an interesting fact that L&L’s discussion of the Davidsonian programme does not mention hermeneutics with *a single word*. They do however discuss Davidson’s methodological approach quite extensively, and thus the constitutive and methodological holism which permeates all interpretation. Therefore, what one could ask, is how holism is to be treated within an analytical practice. I seem to come up against circularity in trying to define linguistic meaning, and I have not found any answer on Davidson’s behalf in how one is to define linguistic meaning. Might it be that Davidson’s theory of interpretation *must* be

⁷⁶ Malpas, “Analysis and Hermeneutics”, 93.

⁷⁷ Davidson, “Thought and Talk,” 156.

understood within a hermeneutical framework? And moreover, could such an approach be of crucial importance when we are now trying to map Davidson onto the somewhat analytically minded semantics-pragmatics interface? It will become evident in the following discussion of different types of meaning, how the apparent *staticity* in the understanding of semantics is something we must overcome if we are to understand Davidson's programme properly.

I will now try to flesh out more fully Davidson's idea of meaning by returning to our quotation in 4i. about what the speakers intend (and mean to be recognized as intending) to mean by their utterances. This will, in due time, take us to Davidson's view of particular communicative exchanges, exemplified as prior and passing theories. This will, I hope, illuminate Davidson's intentions in the construction of a theory of interpretation, and its relation to the semantics-pragmatics interface.

4iv. Introducing Distinctions: The Case from Malapropisms

What is it that determines the content that is shared? A constitutive part of it, we recall, is the circumstances under which the speaker and hearer interpret the meaning of an utterance. The way this happens may need to be distinguished as I tried to do with thinking about *series* of circumstances for the case of linguistic meaning, and *particular* circumstances for the case of intended meaning (that is, what the speaker takes his words to mean). Regardless of how we carve it up, what the words and sentences in the language mean, and what the linguistic agents take them to mean in different contexts, can, as Davidson says, come apart, and we should let nothing "be allowed to obliterate or even blur the distinction between speaker's meaning and literal meaning".⁷⁸ To make better sense then of the influence speakers and hearers have on the content expressed, I will now turn to this distinction, mainly by drawing on "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (henceforth "NDE"). This will also help us with not confusing what I am calling intended meaning with what Davidson here is calling speaker meaning. The difference will become apparent in the following.

Davidson has two main concerns in this essay. One is introducing a tripartite distinction between a) first meaning, b) dictionary meaning and c) speaker meaning. The second lies in presenting a theory of communication by introducing two "theories": the prior theory and the passing theory. As indicated, I will focus on the first of these two concerns to begin with, though they will become integrated as we move along.

⁷⁸ Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs."

The case from malapropisms (there are others), shows that an interpreter can understand a speaker's intentions in uttering *U*, even though this intention departs from the dictionary meaning (the ordinary intention) of the sentence *S* expressed in *U*. It does not matter if the speaker knows she is departing from the standard interpretation or not.

This is usefully exemplified, and the title of the essay is a case at hand. Mrs. Malaprop utters "... and a nice derangement of epitaphs". What she is really trying to say is "a nice arrangement of epithets", and this is in fact what fluent speakers of English *would* understand her as saying in that context. Notice that it is not as if she is saying something else by the use of the correct words. She is *misusing* the words, in this case with similar sounding alternatives, to say something correct (i.e. expressing her intention). An instance of the former "saying something else by the use of the correct words", would simply be the separation of sentence meaning and speaker meaning, for instance by the use of irony or metaphor. In that case, she could say "a nice arrangement of epithets" and speaker-mean "not a nice arrangement of epithets".⁷⁹ For the more important misuse case, what we as interpreters retrieve is what she *intended* to say, and this is achieved even though the meaning of the words/sentence does not supply us with the complete grounds for the correct interpretation. It is almost as if the dictionary meaning is superfluous.

What Davidson characterizes as *first meaning* is, in this case, what Mrs. Malaprop intended to say, and intended the hearer to recognize as her intended meaning, that is, "a nice arrangement of epithets". *Dictionary meaning* is what her words would mean if you would look them up in a dictionary, namely what she "objectively" uttered. Moreover, dictionary meaning would overlap with first meaning had Mrs. Malaprop made use of the words that would *normally* express her intentions; let us go with Grice and call it something like the ordinary intention, or that which is normally conveyed by those words. Lastly, though perhaps not explicitly included in Davidson's example, is *speaker meaning*. This could come on top of the distinction of the latter two meaning types, as when I said that Mrs. Malaprop could be ironic about whether she really could recognize a nice arrangement of epithets while still misusing words ('a nice derangement of epitaphs'). This reflects how the distinction slices into three and not two pieces. In addition to this, we can see that the distinction between first meaning (what the speaker intended to be the literal meaning) and speaker meaning (her being ironic) is relativized to the speaker. That is, the distinction between what the speaker intended

⁷⁹ I am following Lepore and Ludwig's discussion to some degree here. Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, 265-267.

to be her dictionary meaning (but was not) and what she intended to speaker-mean by those words, emerges from the speaker.

What the case is meant to show is that the prior knowledge of the dictionary meaning of words is *not sufficient* for actual communicative success. There is nothing about Mrs. Malaprop's sentence that could, *in and of itself*, lead the hearer to the intended interpretation. That is not an interesting fact *per se* (if the phenomenon is merely an exception from the rule). The weighty claim is that such prior knowledge is *not necessary*. What Davidson denies is that conventions or regularities, or prior learning of the use of words, play a necessary role in communication. I will concentrate on this claim of non-necessity. But first, let me make an interesting connection with the semantics-pragmatics distinction with regard to the insufficiency claim.

If it is *never* sufficient with dictionary meaning for successful communication, then pragmaticists are right when they say that sentence meanings – understood as dictionary meaning – do not supply the speaker or hearer with complete thoughts. Something else always needs to be the case, and this something else is inferred from the context of utterance. (Or at least one would be led to think so if semantics is equated with sentence or dictionary meaning.) That is why I made the proviso “merely an exception from the rule”.

I believe that the non-necessity claim can illuminate the Davidsonian concept of semantics, a concept which is possibly reflected *both* in the idea of first meaning and dictionary meaning. Following L&L, we can divide the non-necessity claim into a weak and a strong form. The strong form says that, *as a matter of fact*, linguistic agents do not need knowledge of the conventions of the use of words prior to a successful communicative exchange. We could manage without knowing what a dictionary would say about word meaning, and still be able to understand each other by the use of language. This is, in effect, mirrored in the epistemic position of the RI. The RI cannot know the meaning of any of the words she is to interpret. If she were to succeed in interpreting nonetheless, then this would possibly confirm the strong form of the non-necessity claim. Would the converse be true as well? Would the implausibility of the claim undermine the project of radical interpretation? If it was necessary, but not sufficient, to know the conventional meaning of words prior to communication exchanges (i.e. interpreting practices), then how could the RI ever succeed? The connection between Davidson's discussion of malapropisms and the success of the RI is not made by L&L. As far as I can see, there is no reason not to introduce this connection. At any rate, Davidson unambiguously says that the sharing of “a supply of words” is not

necessary to “explain our actual communicative achievements”, where ‘words’ here is to be understood as dictionary meaning.⁸⁰ What if we deploy L&L’s weak form of the non-necessity claim? Could this be a justified exegesis?

The weak form says that, *in principle*, one could communicate without prior knowledge of the dictionary meaning of words. This could be recast in asking, ignoring “natural limitations of knowledge and cognitive abilities (...), whether there are facts independent of linguistic conventions that determine (or could determine) what a speaker means by his words”.⁸¹ This way of putting it also brings us back to the success of the RI, and Davidson clearly believes that such non-linguistic facts are available to the RI. These facts are the hold-true attitudes of the speaker, and these hold-true attitudes mirror the speaker’s dispositions to use certain words and sentences in particular circumstances. So if the RI *could* succeed, then prior knowledge of the linguistic conventions guiding the use of words is not necessary. (What is needed, however, is *a number of* similar responses (e.g. utterances) under similar circumstances.) Except, are there really any differences, *qua* the question of the success of the RI, between the strong and the weak form of the non-necessity claim? I cannot see that there are at this point, but that is in any case peripheral to our discussion now. I think we need to distinguish two theoretical domains. One was discussed in chapter three, where we showed how Davidson approached the understanding of the concepts of belief and meaning through his investigator, the RI. The second centers on actual communicative practices, and “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs” is arguably an essay fleshing out Davidson’s theory of communication. Nevertheless, a highly theoretical theory of meaning must not be in conflict with actual communicative practices if it is to be counted as explanatory, so clear tensions between the two domains would count against the Davidsonian programme as a whole. Let us accept my division, and rather bring it back to the forefront at a later juncture.⁸²

Davidson’s theory of communication is a theory that tries to show – via the case from malapropisms – that it is not sufficient with prior knowledge of word meaning to interpret one another successfully. Moreover, it is meant to show that such prior knowledge *is not necessary*, either as a matter of fact, given our cognitive and communicative abilities, or in

⁸⁰ Donald Davidson, “The Social Aspect of Language,” 1994, in *Truth, Language, and History*, Reprint 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 110.

⁸¹ Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, 278-279.

⁸² A comment on this division: even though I separate a theory of meaning from a theory of communication, and state that the latter concerns *actual* communicative situations, this is not to be confused with the difference between, as Davidson says, the “(empirical) question [of] how we actually go about understanding a speaker with the (philosophical) question what is necessary and sufficient for such understanding”. Davidson, “The Social Aspect of Language,” 111-112.

There is nothing in my division that demands that a theory of communication – even though I call it actual – should not be given in terms of the (philosophically construed) conditions underlying it.

principle, disregarding our cognitive powers. This corresponds, respectively, to L&L's strong and weak form of the claim. I would like to disregard the weak claim on a simple, but plausible ground. If this really is meant to be a theory of *communication*, as I suggested in the previous paragraph, then how could we disregard the agents that constitute this practice? We would disregard the nature of these agents if we stipulated other cognitive abilities than those we in fact hold. Davidson *is* concerned with explaining "our *actual* communicative achievements", and for this reason it would make no sense to illuminate how "two gods could speak to each other"⁸³ as L&L say, even if this shows how knowledge of the *dispositions* one has in using the words one does, could suffice for successful communication (between gods). What gods know is how other gods are disposed to use their words, prior to any observation of each others' practices. The RI, however, cannot constitute a theory of truth for a speaker based on a *single* interpretive situation. The RI, due to her non-omniscience, must draw inferences and observe the speaker in a *multiple* of circumstances to make sense of his dispositions to use the words that he does under the circumstances he does. The RI does not entertain unrealized dispositions. For this reason I take the target to be the strong form of the non-necessity claim. The second reason is, as the observant reader may have inferred, to be found in the principle of charity. This principle of rational accommodation invokes many assumptions about what it is to be a rational agent, and thus it implicitly equips the RI with beliefs about the world that are *similar to* the agents she is trying to interpret (even though this is not stipulated when we are first acquainted with the epistemic position of the RI). The RI assumes a great deal about the speaker in invoking the principle of charity; a great deal not taken into account by L&L's gods. The level of abstraction introduced by these gods is not on a par with Davidson's level. Davidson's RI knows, as he stresses, "a lot about the world and about how people behave in various circumstances".⁸⁴ The RI is very much *alike* the speaker she is interpreting, and this rules out omniscient beings, and constrains the epistemic position of the RI to a more realistic level. Let us return to the non-necessity claim, interpreted in its strong form.

It will be important for our purposes to make proper sense of Davidson's position in the case of knowledge of word meaning. The reason for this is that the semantics-pragmatics debate worries about such questions as: "Could we have knowledge of linguistic meaning that would suffice for the expression and interpretation of thoughts?" The strong form of the non-

⁸³ Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, 279.

⁸⁴ Davidson, "Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore," 81.

necessity claim says that no, we do not need knowledge of dictionary meaning to successfully express and interpret thoughts. One thing the non-necessity claim also says, is that the occurrences of communication without prior knowledge of word meaning are not exceptions; they are properly *characteristic* of linguistic communication. The link to the semantics-pragmatics debate is, once more, obvious: Do we need to postulate more context-sensitivity than the pure indexical elements in order to convey thoughts via the semantics of language? A number of semanticists would respond negatively to this, but the non-necessity claim seems to say that we always need something besides, or instead of, dictionary meaning. Of course, it is not as if Davidson does not have a positive answer to what we in fact need to share for communication to be successful, but his theory is given in different concepts than many are used to. This can be brought out by questioning what we mean when we talk about linguistic or dictionary meaning. Semantics would arguably be the proper domain for such inquiry, and to some extent this is also true for Davidson. What Davidson is arguing for, is that a semantics for a language need not be learned prior to a communicative exchange, as is the common assumption. These claims are mirrored in his prior and passing theories. It remains to be seen, however, whether Davidson would need a “stable” component in his semantics, a stability many semanticists such as Cappelen & Lepore and Stanley demand of semantic theories.

4v. The Prior Theory and The Passing Theory

I made a division between Davidson’s theory of meaning on one hand, and the theory of communication he put forward in “NDE” on the other. Given that the former is an inquiry undertaken by the RI, I asked whether the rejection of Davidson’s non-necessity claim would cause trouble for the RI’s success. I made the division in order to not confuse what Davidson was trying to do. The division I made gains support when Davidson writes that he wants to know “how people who already have a language (whatever exactly that means) manage to apply their skill or knowledge to actual cases of interpretation”.⁸⁵ It is still not clear how the theory of meaning and the theory of communication can come apart, particularly in light of Davidson’s underlining of circumstances as essential to meaning, but I will nonetheless accept the division I made for the sake of my expository concerns.

What would count as successful communication? If the speaker and interpreter shared an understanding of the speaker’s words – however deviant from standard uses –, then this would in principle suffice, Davidson says. To understand the speaker’s words is to understand

⁸⁵ Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” 100.

her dispositions to use certain words and sentences under given circumstances. A speaker's hold-true attitudes toward utterances would be another way to put the point. What is essential for Davidson is that the knowledge we draw on in interpreting utterances *is geared to the occasion*. This makes sense in light of his view on the circumstance as essential to interpretation. How does this manifest itself in actual communicative situations?

Here the prior and passing theories come into play.⁸⁶ The prior theory, for the interpreter, is "how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of the speaker"⁸⁷, and this theory has been formed by the evidence he has so far gathered about the speaker. This may include "knowledge of the character, dress, role, sex (...) and whatever else has been gained by observing the speaker's behaviour, linguistic or otherwise".⁸⁸ The prior theory for the speaker is what he believes this theory of the interpreter to be. A speaker comes equipped with a belief about how his own language will be interpreted by a certain interpreter. These prior theories contrast with the passing theories. The latter is how an interpreter *actually* interprets the speaker's utterances, while it for the speaker is the theory he intends the interpreter to use.

In this sense communication is, as Grice showed, a highly co-operative practice. On one hand we have the interpreter who constructs hypotheses about the speaker he is to interpret, and on the other hand we have the speaker who comes equipped with beliefs about how his utterances will be interpreted. What is carried out when they communicate is, for the interpreter, adjustment of his theory so as to best make sense of (the utterances of), or rationally accommodate, the speaker, while it for the speaker is important that he be understood as he intends to be understood. For him to be justified in believing that he be so interpreted, he must construct assumptions about how his utterances will in fact be interpreted.

First meanings would fit neatly into the passing theory. If first meaning departs from dictionary meaning, then first meaning is the meaning that the speaker intends the interpreter to grasp, and it is in fact what the interpreter grasps if communication succeeds. More importantly, first meanings are, in general, first in the order of interpretation. Davidson would most likely not want to say that the interpreter in the first instance "gains access to" the dictionary meaning in order to adjust his interpretation for the speaker on the basis of that.

⁸⁶ Analogous to a theory of truth for linguistic agents, these prior and passing theories are not meant to reflect theories linguistic agents in fact hold. They are meant to be descriptive of something else than knowledge. I will return to this in the subsequent chapter.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 100.

This would imitate a so-called bottom-up approach on the sentential level: You start with the actual words or the actual sentence, and work your way “up” to an interpretation from there. What we see at this point, however, is what looks like a top-down, context-driven inference. Here the interpreter grasps the speaker’s intentions in uttering the words that he did prior to any reflection of what the words dictionary-meant. As Davidson says, “it often happens that we can descry the literal meaning of a word or phrase by first appreciating what the speaker was getting at”.⁸⁹ It is not clear to me at this point how one should understand what Davidson expresses by alluding to firstness in the explanation of meaning, so I will return to this in the following chapter.

There is not any serious controversy about the distinction between prior and passing theories so far. You could reasonably claim that a speaker could provide you with interpretative clues in the course of a speech exchange, in the sense that all the knowledge you come equipped with prior to an interaction would not suffice. What makes this a controversial and substantial claim, is that prior and passing theories *need not overlap*. What it takes for communication to succeed, is that the passing theories be shared. Moreover, a passing theory could not be learned in advance. That is, our linguistic competence in actual speech exchanges cannot, in general, correspond to something learned in advance, due to malapropisms and other possible anomalies. Would we then like to say that our linguistic competence lies in converging on passing theories? Let me return to this in a moment.

Davidson draws from this division of prior and passing theories the conclusion that linguistic conventions do not fit into the picture of how we successfully communicate, because knowledge of such conventions would not suffice. Be that as it may, Davidson also says that knowledge of a prior theory for a speaker or interpreter was “essential to *arriving* at the passing theory, but what was learned could not have *been* the passing theory”.⁹⁰ The nature of this relation – like many of the other relations Davidson constructs – is vague. It seems to me that if the prior theory is essential, that is, *necessary*, for arriving at the passing theory, then is not the non-necessity claim refuted? If the interpretive move from a “a nice derangement of epitaphs” to “a nice arrangement of epithets” makes use of the knowledge you have of the latter to get to the former, then why is it not necessary that you know this prior to interpreting Mrs. Malaprop? It seems as if the knowledge you reach in your passing theory is grounded in your prior theory, and if so it would be necessary.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 103 (my italics).

In what way should we take the prior theory to be necessary for the construction of the passing theory? A preliminary stab at what happens in the case of Mrs. Malaprop, would be to say that the interpreter first interprets the dictionary meaning of Mrs. Malaprop's words, and from that draws the inference that this could not have been the meaning she wanted to convey; this is what I called a bottom-up process. Having made that assumption, the interpreter can assign different meanings to her words in order to "get the interpretation right". This is a co-operative effort on the interpreter's behalf; the speaker need not even know that she said something ridiculous. If this scenario were correct, then the linguistic meaning of what was dictionary-meant served a necessary role for what was the speaker's first meaning, however not *in terms of* the dictionary meaning of the words, but rather as an indication to the intended interpretation. When Davidson says that what was learned in advance could not have been the passing theory, he simply means that we could not have known prior to the exchange that Mrs. Malaprop meant "arrangement" by the use of 'derangement', and "epithets" by the use of 'epitaphs'. But are we to take Davidson to mean that the words of the speaker work as a guide for the hearer to the intended interpretation? I think Davidson wishes to hold the stronger claim that Mrs. Malaprop's first meaning was the *semantics* of the utterance, and not that the semantics was *limited to* what she dictionary-meant, as would be the common take on semantics. This idea will be important when I explicate what I take to be Davidsonian semantics at a later juncture.

Yet another thing that makes it difficult to map Davidson onto a semantics-pragmatics distinction, is that this separation of prior and passing theories could imply that the (naive) concept of a language – understood as something you learn in advance, and deploy in linguistic communication to share thoughts – is too static. The concept of a semantics for a language in the semantics-pragmatics debate is perhaps too fixated on an idea of linguistic meaning as stable and thus *given* prior to our speech exchanges. This view is not what Davidson has in mind in "NDE". He said, no more than about fifteen years ago, that "there is no point to language beyond successful communication. Speakers create the language; meaning is what we can abstract from accomplished verbal exchanges".⁹¹ The reason for my concern in how to map Davidson onto the semantics-pragmatics distinction is reflected here, and in his concluding remarks in "NDE":

⁹¹ Davidson, "Dialectic and Dialogue," 1994, in *Truth, Language, and History*. Reprint 2009, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 258.

we have discovered no learnable common core of consistent behaviour, no shared grammar or rules, no portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance. We may say that linguistic ability is the ability to converge on passing theory from time to time (...) but if we do say this, then (...) we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally.⁹²

If this – somewhat depressing picture – is true, then it would not fare well with my aim in this thesis. What this erasing of a boundary would in effect amount to, is the very same erasing of a boundary between semantics and pragmatics, traditionally construed. If we could, however, say something substantially semantic about the *passing theories*, then we have provided some justification for the semantic side of the interface. But what could we say about pragmatics? There is, in regard to this quote, uncertainty about whether the actual convergence of passing theories on one hand, and any *other* type of mutual understanding on the other hand is – taken together – the correspondent of general world competence. Which boundary is in effect erased here? Initially I interpreted this quote as saying that what we are competent in when we communicate verbally with one another, is no more systematic than what we are competent in when we know “our way around in the world generally”. Now we see that it is clear that we have reason to understand Davidson as saying that it is the rules or the derivation processes for *arriving* at the prior theory that is unsystematic, and hence for interpreting him as saying that the erasing of a boundary is the erasing between how we come to share prior theories and how we get around in the world in general.

Is there any way to construe the semantics-pragmatics interface differently so as to accommodate Davidson’s conception of language? For one thing, we know that Davidson says in a number of places that a Tarski-style theory of truth for a language would give the meaning of any arbitrary sentence in a language. In fact, it would be a “portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance”. Or at least that is what Davidson did envisage. The conflict between the (pre-1984) idea of a theory that gives the meaning of all sentences or utterances, and the (post-1984) idea that utterances of the same sentence can mean radically different things from context to context, all depending on speaker intentions, seems on the face of it incompatible. It is at this point not clear whether Davidson has changed his mind about some things, or whether there is a part of the picture we are missing out on. We should of course take note of the fact that another ten years have passed since “Thought and Talk”, and a total of twenty years now from the time he laid the foundation for his theory of meaning, and until the time he wrote “NDE”. Important to

⁹² Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” 107.

mention is also Grice's influence on Davidson. This is particularly present in "NDE", where we see how the recognition of intentions for something to be properly called (overt) communication, possibly is that which forms a basis for Davidson's insistence on the speaker's *influence* on the content expressed.

In this chapter we have gone through some opacities with the idea of sentence meaning, and tried to sharpen the problems we are facing when trying to map Davidson onto the semantics-pragmatics interface. In this regard it has been especially fruitful to assess the distinctions Davidson introduces in "NDE", as the concept of meaning here becomes crystallized. It also gave us an opportunity to assess and refute L&L's interpretation of the RI in relation to the views expressed in "NDE". The idea of the epistemic position of the RI will be taken up again in the following.

*there are no rules for arriving at passing theories,
no rules in any strict sense, as opposed to rough
maxims and methodological generalities.
A passing theory really is like a theory at least in this,
that it is derived by wit, luck, and wisdom (...)*⁹³

5. The Marginalized Semantics and the Mysterious Pragmatics

In this final chapter I will propose how the mapping could be executed, with the understanding I have made of the Davidsonian programme throughout the thesis, and the necessary clarifications made in regard to the mapping onto the interface in the previous chapter.

What has been underlying difficulties throughout the previous chapter, is Davidson's somewhat freewheeling use of the concept of a circumstance, the appeal to intentions in separating kinds of meanings, and the highly idealized conception of what a shared language is. What role(s), for instance, is the concept of a circumstance supposed to play in the explanation of meaning? Are we correct in distinguishing two ways of thinking about it, as I did at the beginning in the separation of series of homogeneous circumstances contrasted with particular heterogeneous circumstances? The former is that which constitutes linguistic meaning, the latter is that which helps speakers get their intended meaning across (when understood as different from linguistic meaning). How can we make sense of such a distinction in particular interpretive circumstances? Do the linguistic agents draw on different aspects of the circumstance in identifying linguistic meaning as different from intended meaning, or even in the case of speaker meaning? If so, does this partition reflect something about the knowledge that the agents draw on in interpreting one another? And what further explanatory role is played by Davidson's distinction between first meaning, dictionary meaning and speaker meaning? I will start to answer some of these exegetical issues in the following section. After I have settled these further issues, I will revisit Davidson's semantic programme and propose a way one could accommodate Davidson so as to provide his framework with more explanatory power in the case of communicative competence.

5i. Different Circumstances or Different Competencies?

I made a preliminary distinction in 4i. between sentence meaning and intended meaning, and offered a proposal to understand these in terms of different conceptions of a circumstance. Is this the most advantageous distinction *qua* the target of mapping Davidson onto the

⁹³ Ibid., 107.

semantics-pragmatics distinction? Does it not merely reflect Davidson's idea of linguistic meaning, and therefore not intended meaning and speaker meaning, which we also need to account for?

I think the difference between homogeneous and heterogeneous circumstances is correct, but does it really *say* much? Agents in the latter sense of circumstance draw on the different contexts of utterance to get their intended meaning across. Well, of course they do. We need to know what it is that they draw on in such circumstances, and what, if anything, differentiates it from sentence meaning. (Maybe this is what Davidson has reservations about, that is, about saying something general about what happens in the cases of intended first meanings.)

An alternative and more substantial way to think about the different kinds of circumstances – if there is one – is to propose that linguistic agents draw on different kinds of *knowledge* when interpreting speech and speaker intentions. This could be a difference between, on one hand, semantic or linguistic competence, and the accompanying question there would be what one is competent in. But would this illuminate the knowledge one has when one knows (the semantic part of) a language? Put differently, would that which is constitutive of a passing theory or of dictionary meaning shed light on what one knows when one knows a language? Does competence illuminate knowledge? For Davidson it does not. A theory of meaning given in truth-theoretical terms *describes* or *models* linguistic competence, and it is not meant to entail that the interpreter or speaker has explicit (or maybe even implicit) *knowledge* of such a theory. Such theories are not “claims about the propositional knowledge of an interpreter, nor are they claims about the details of the inner workings of some part of the brain. They are rather claims about (...) the competence of the interpreter”.⁹⁴ Or as L&L say, the theory is meant to “capture the structure of a complex practical ability, [and not] a theory which speakers of the language are supposed to know in any sense”.⁹⁵

On the other hand, the (*ex hypothesi*) different communicative competence could be general world and agent knowledge, whatever it is that helps you infer the intentions of the agent by way of understanding his speech or other communicative tools. So, for instance, when Grice offers us an account of what non-natural meaning is in “Meaning”⁹⁶, he does not in any clear sense *restrict* the account of the recognition of intentions to the use of language.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁵ Ernie Lepore and Kirk Ludwig, *Donald Davidson's Truth-Theoretic Semantics*, Reprinted 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.

⁹⁶ H. P. Grice, “Meaning,” 1957, in *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., ed A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

One could just as well, though perhaps with greater difficulty, induce beliefs in an agent by way of (and in terms of) him recognizing your intentions to do so. The same is true for Austin in his account of performative utterances. Here the performative actions are conditioned by norms or other contextual factors; they are appropriate, and not true or false. The relation between grammar – and thus language – and performatives is only to some degree overlapping, so it is not in any obvious sense restricted to language. I could just as well command you to close the door by putting up a frowning face, and acting as if I shiver. Why should not that be viewed as a command any less than the utterance “Close the door!” would? Stanley, for instance, is quite clear that we need a distinction between what should be counted as linguistic competence and what should be counted as general world and agent knowledge. He says that

a kick under the table, a tap on the shoulder, or a frown are all frequently occurring communicative actions (...) There is no doubt much of interest to be said about how general knowledge is brought to bear in interpreting communicative interchanges of this sort. However, it would be an error to extend the domain of linguistic theory to account for them.⁹⁷

I introduced the distinction between different ways of understanding circumstances in order to try to make sense of the emergence of sentence meaning in terms of circumstances, as contrasted with intended (first) meaning. More precisely, I showed how the RI bases interpretation of sentence meaning on the pattern of hold-true attitudes under specific circumstances. This is the series of circumstances, as I have called it. Intended meaning and speaker meaning, however, are also dependent upon the circumstance of utterance. But are they dependent on the circumstance in the same way as the project of radical interpretation in determining sentence meaning is? For the proposal of differentiating circumstances to work we would have to systematically distinguish circumstances correspondent with the sentence meaning/intended meaning distinction. We shall see below that the prospect for this is dim, and I will for this reason suggest that the hypothesis should be rejected. We need to face the problem of distinguishing sentence meaning and intended meaning in other terms. The idea I will pursue is that we should invoke competencies, as captured by a theory of truth, in order to see how the distinction between sentence meaning and speaker meaning may survive within a Davidsonian framework.

Before I move on to the discussion, I would like to make clear again how a division (or not) of competencies is mapable onto the semantics-pragmatics interface. One part of the

⁹⁷ Stanley, “Context and Logical Form,” 408-409.

divide should reflect something we would be justified in calling semantics. The other part should reflect something of a pragmatic nature. The former should, *minimally*, reflect the recursive feature of language and its compositionality, since these are important constraints on any theory of meaning for Davidson (and to a large degree accepted as part of the structure of natural languages for many philosophers and linguists). Pragmatics should show us how interpreters grasp semantic intentions, and how speaker meaning is conveyed and understood. It is, of course, not as if these terms are determinate, and all we need to do is to construct a good exegesis of Davidson's philosophy of language, and then map it onto the interface. The terms are all up for grabs to some degree, and they are all dynamic in relation to each other. What I have to do is establish that my exegesis of Davidson is a good and coherent one, and that the categorizations of the interface that I propose are plausible in light of that exegesis, as well as consistent with the distinction as I have outlined it in the course of this thesis.

5ii. A Theory of Meaning and a Theory of Communication

In section 4iv. I distinguished two theoretical domains; one was discussed in chapter three, where I showed how Davidson approached the understanding of the concepts of belief and meaning through his surrogate investigator, the RI; the second centered on actual communicative practices and was discussed in depth in the previous chapter. I called this latter Davidson's theory of communication. We therefore have a stipulated division between a theory of meaning and a theory of communication.

I believe that the division I made will be essential for us at this juncture. Remember that what the project of radical interpretation should show us is what sentence meaning is. It should clearly not cover intended meaning or speaker meaning due, in part, to these meanings' unclear relation to sentence meaning. Others would argue that these meanings are resistant to systematic theorizing as such; I will stay neutral on that matter.⁹⁸ One reason why the division is important will be reflected in the fact that my discussion has made it so that the RI cannot grasp *first* meaning in radical interpretation, only *dictionary* meaning. How so? For the reason that first meaning is arguably not systematic (and perhaps not strictly learnable). The RI needs systematicity and homogeneity; she needs a series of circumstances, that is, several sufficiently similar circumstances under which sufficiently similar utterances are

⁹⁸ Cappelen & Lepore, for instance, implicitly argue that theories about what speakers mean in particular contexts cannot be generalized. Cappelen & Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism*, 58. (See also my 4In72).

interpreted.⁹⁹ If this is correct, one is faced with the problem of accounting for first meaning within Davidson's preferred semantic framework. This framework should be given through the project of radical interpretation which is partly set to answer the question of what one could know that would put one in a position to interpret utterances. I see no reason at this point not to assume that the apparent mismatch between this project and first meaning actually holds, but it creates a serious tension for Davidson. I will discuss this after I have made notice of how the connection between first meaning and radical interpretation has been wrongly construed in the literature on Davidson's conception of first meaning.

C. J. L. Talmage, for instance, is wrong when she says that Davidson is unsuccessful in equating literal meaning with first meaning, and tries to show this by appealing to the case from radical interpretation. The reason for her mistake is that she does not take into account that the RI needs, as I stressed, a *series* of homogeneous circumstances in order to construct a theory of meaning for a speaker. First meaning does not supply the RI with this. That the radical interpreter of Mrs. Malaprop would "eventually discover correlations between 'derangement' and arrangements and 'epitaph' and epitaphs"¹⁰⁰ is beside the point, because interpreting malaprops and the like is not supposed to be covered by prior learning, and thus cannot be "eventually discovered". Her discussion of the divergence between first meaning and literal meaning is therefore a misconception. It reflects how dispositions to use words are what is important, but neglects to acknowledge that dispositions cannot be inferred from a single utterance for the RI. (If first meaning should be considered literal or not is of course still an open question, but it cannot be dismissed on the grounds given by Talmage.)

5ii.a. Radical Interpretation Revisited

I have, by separating Davidson's theory of meaning from a theory of communication, caused a tension in regard to the project of radical interpretation. What we are slowly trying to get to

⁹⁹ What "sufficiently similar" should amount to is of course unclear. A discussion of it, however, would more properly be sorted under a critical discussion of the principle of charity. In such a discussion we could ask if the sharing of sets of *true* beliefs should also result in a set of *similar* beliefs. Davidson assumes that the principle of charity *both* lends support to the claim that the beliefs of the speakers are true, but also that we are *in agreement* about the utterance situation, i.e. the circumstances under which interpretation takes place. But it is not enough to show that we share true beliefs, for truth is not a finite size. We could share true beliefs, but why would these beliefs be the same, or even sufficiently similar?

This issue is also taken up in Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*. Here, they isolate the agreement-part of the principle of charity, and argue that it follows from their reconstructed "principle of Grace". I am not sure about what arguments can be presented for why we should be in agreement about the circumstances we find ourselves in, and where the RI interprets speakers. That there is an assumption about *rational agency* does not seem to suffice either, for how could coherence among our beliefs (or other forms of rationality assumptions) exclude a vast set of non-overlapping beliefs in the interpretation situation? What we need is shared true beliefs, and that these beliefs be more or less the same ones. I could, however, be occupied with other aspects of my environment than you would be, and we could also view the same aspects of the environment differently. (The latter point is a general folk psychology belief. Given the implausibility in the idea that our perceptions of the world and the correspondent beliefs are not colored by our individual *psychological* make-up, then why should not this also affect the way we interpret the context of utterance?)

¹⁰⁰ C. J. L. Talmage, "Literal Meaning, Conventional Meaning and First Meaning," *Erkenntnis* 40, no 2 (March 1994), 219 (my italics).

at this point, is a conception of Davidsonian semantics which can accommodate first meaning. First meaning is in conflict with the conception of radical interpretation as I have construed it.

I have continuously stressed that the RI needs a series of circumstances in order to interpret a speaker. What is essential for the RI is the hold-true attitudes of the speaker, and these attitudes are, from the speaker's point of view, directed toward the utterance. I have argued that the RI cannot access the meaning of the utterance, on the basis of the speaker's dispositions to use the words he does, unless she can do this *over time*. This is what is reflected in what I called a series of circumstances. Furthermore, a case from omniscience, such as that presented by L&L's gods, would bypass my idea of a series of circumstances. I have, however, showed that the epistemic position of the RI is *not* meant to be on such a high level of abstraction as that, and on that basis refuted L&L's case. In addition to this, we also know that a governing principle of the RI is rationality, as is implicit in the principle of charity. That the RI should interpret the speaker *coherently* is thus another, though connected, reason why the RI needs a series of circumstances. What is to be counted as rationally coherent can only be judged so on the basis of knowledge of prior rational behavior, partly due to the holistically minded interpretation.

To preliminary conclude then: What the first point shows, is that a series of circumstances is needed for a *correlation* between utterance and circumstance to occur, if we wish to maintain an epistemically realistic RI. What the last point shows, is how the holistically colored rational accommodation needs a background to interpret against. Our challenge lies in accommodating first meaning within this way of conceptualizing the project of radical interpretation (which is the project that specifies what meaning is). So in what way then do we have an accommodation problem? Both dictionary meaning (to be qualified presently) and first meaning share the same empirical object: occasions of utterance. What makes it difficult for the RI to interpret normal dictionary meaning on occasion, as contrasted with first meaning on occasion? First meaning should come out of the end of these discussions as a semantic type of meaning, if we wish (and we do) to keep it different from the interpretation of the intentions involved in speaker meaning. Let me then turn to a discussion of the role of intentions in accounting for meaning in order to clarify the problem.

5iii. Intentions in First Meaning and Speaker Meaning

Recall the tripartite distinction between intended first meaning, dictionary meaning and speaker meaning. What is absolutely essential for understanding Davidson's ambitions is, in

relation to the semantic part of the interface, how first meaning and dictionary meaning are related. These can, but do not normally, come apart. When they do come apart, this is not to be accounted for by speaker meaning, *even though* recognition of the speaker's intentions is essential in arriving at first meaning, as I will discuss in more detail below. Intentions are essential to speaker meaning as well, and this makes it important to tread carefully and be precise.

In this section I should try to make clear what the relation between first meaning and dictionary meaning is, and if these meanings can be properly categorized within a semantic category. In order to do this I will first analyze the difference between first meaning and speaker meaning, and I will do this in terms of intentions. This is done in order to settle the question of whether speaker meaning and first meaning really are significantly different from each other, and if they are, how first meaning may be semantic. Intentions are, moreover, a somewhat messy way of distinguishing types of meanings from each other.

So what role do intentions play in the instances of first meaning and speaker meaning? First of all, first meaning is that which comes first in the order of interpretation. What does this mean? Davidson thinks of intentions as forming chains, where the chains are teleologically construed. In the case of a fire, you could have an intention of getting someone's attention about the fire. You could do this by shouting "I need water!" This, furthermore, should reflect three different intentions. The *ulterior* intention, or purpose, is that of getting someone's attention so that the person could help you put out the fire (compare with Austin's perlocutionary acts). Another is the intention of *force*; here, the commanding of someone to fetch water. Finally, there is the *semantic* intention, which in this case is the intention that your utterance will be interpreted as you wanted it to be (that you need water). The speaker did not intend his words to have another meaning than they normally do, and thus first meaning is not separated from dictionary meaning. (It is not important for this illustration whether we are dealing with non-standard uses of words or not.) More generally we can say that your ulterior intention is achieved by your utterance having a certain force, and this again is done by your words meaning what you intend them to be understood as meaning. First meaning, then, is that which corresponds to the first intention in such a chain (i.e. the latter of the three just enumerated). "The first intention", Davidson says, "that has to do with what words mean, or are intended to mean, is the intention to speak words that will be assigned a

certain meaning by an interpreter”.¹⁰¹ According to this view, the psychology of the interpreter should follow this interpretative strategy: The speaker said “I need water” and meant me to recognize that he meant that he needed water. He wanted me to recognize this, and so by that commanded me to fetch water, in order to help him put out the fire.

These three intentions are meant to be present in all speech acts, and the primacy of first meaning is given in two respects; one, it is that which corresponds to the semantic intentions of the speaker; and two, it *forms the basis for* what words, as used on occasion, mean. We might, in connection with the latter reason, already here see why first meaning, when separated from dictionary meaning, might be thought to be of a *semantic* kind, and not merely a pragmatic aspect of meaning. In order to see this I will introduce a second tripartite distinction, and exemplify it with the case of Mrs. Malaprop.

Dictionary meaning should be understood on two levels. One level corresponds to an interpreter’s prior theory, and is individual. The other level is an abstraction of the set of all such prior theories (e.g. Norwegian). Your prior theory for a speaker (and the speaker’s prior theory for you) is among the set of all prior theories. You come to a communication situation with specific expectations about the meaning of the words for that interpreter or speaker. The prior theory is in play prior to and in communication. The dictionary meaning on the highest level is simply an abstraction of the uses of language of many linguistic agents. No one prior theory is identical to this high level. The dictionary meaning on the lower level is an abstraction of the expectations one has of a specific speaker or interpreter, or a small group perhaps.¹⁰² I will use ‘dictionary meaning’ (and the corresponding ‘dictionary-say’) so as to refer to the concept of a prior theory unless I state otherwise. The passing theory’s place in this is how we actually communicate on the basis of our prior theories, and it is here that ongoing changes are made to the agent’s words. These changes might be implemented in the prior theories for the agent, but certainly not for the higher level dictionary meaning. Now recall Mrs. Malaprop. She dictionary-said “a nice derangement of epitaphs”, and meant by that a nice arrangement of epithets. Here, then, we have a prior theory for dictionary-said that corresponds to the more abstract level of meaning, they converge. (This is not meant to be a rare exception; we do not want prior theories to be so radically different so as to seldom be similar to the higher level meaning. What we do want, however, is flexibility.) You come to

¹⁰¹ Donald Davidson, “Locating Literary Language,” 1993, in *Truth, Language, and History*, Reprint 2009 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173.

¹⁰² The relationship between the two levels of dictionary meaning is not in conflict with Davidson’s obligation to the primacy of the idiolect over the language. The higher level is an abstraction of the set of all prior theories, and is not in any sense primary to the individual prior theories. It is the prior theories (in combination with passing theories) that give life to meaning. That we can abstract a higher level of dictionary meaning is a *de facto* aspect of meaning, and not constitutive of it.

the communication situation with an expectation that ‘derangement’ will mean derangement, and this is plausibly reflected in (nearly) all prior theories (and hence “the language”). What she meant is of course what is presented as her first meaning, and this is reflected by the passing theory. Let us for the sake of argument suppose that Mrs. Malaprop would make that mistake more than once in that play (and maybe she does, for all I know). If she, in a subsequent and different circumstance, misuses her words again in this way in order to assert that something would be recognized as a nice arrangement of epithets, then the interpreter, having heard her malapropism on a previous occasion, assigns meaning to her words on the basis of his *prior* theory for Mrs. Malaprop (but not as reflected in any high level dictionary meaning). This is accommodated in the prior theory one has for her on a somewhat permanent basis (until the need for a change arises). Her first meaning, what she intended and did actually dictionary-say, now plays a semantic role in her idiolect for the interpreter. *More importantly*, we need to show that it played a semantic role *the first time* she misused her words, when the interpreter had to change his prior theory for Mrs. Malaprop in light of the passing theory. Malaprops and other anomalies are, by their nature, misuses which generally occur only once. What we need to explain is how first meaning, thought of as new to a prior theory, occurring within a passing theory here and now, can be given a semantic basis. What the interpreter is meant to understand, and what can (hopefully) be explained by Davidson’s theory of meaning, is what the speaker intended her words to mean, but not what she dictionary-said. If this picture is correct, then a theory of truth for a language becomes also a theory of truth *for a speaker*!

We remember that we had to be careful in separating first meaning from dictionary meaning in terms of semantics due to the project of radical interpretation. But we had reasons to separate them, because I tried to show that the RI could not help us in the case of first meanings due to the need for a series of circumstances. Dictionary meaning, however, would according to this view of the RI be accommodated. We now need to explain *the relation* between dictionary meaning and first meaning, and this connection should be explained in terms of Davidson’s semantic theory.

Let us see how Mrs. Malaprop’s first meaning fits into the sequence of intentions as I laid it out. Her ulterior intention might be to a) let someone know that she could detect some set of epithets as being nicely arranged. She does this by b) asserting that she would be able to, and this is done by c) uttering words the meaning of which the interpreter is to take as what she intends them to mean. The order of interpretation starts with the latter, and demands

of us that the interpreter *first* grasps the first meaning of her utterance. Our problem here is to explain how that is possible. Why is it not the case that the interpreter follows up on what she dictionary-said; infer that she could not have meant this; and that her words must have meant something else; for *so* to grasp her first meaning? Does Davidson claim that first meaning comes *before* dictionary meaning, *for an interpreter*? On a more abstract level he does claim that it is what we intend our utterances to be taken to mean that constitute meaning, but how does this work in practice? To put it another way: In virtue of *what* does an interpreter grasp first meaning? Let us not be so narrow minded as to exclude the possibility that interpreters may do several things at one time – it may not be the case that ‘first’ is meant to pick out that psychological process which the interpreter deals with in the first place; the interpreter might deal with the semantic intentions of the speaker *and* the dictionary meaning of her words *simultaneously*. This, if correct, is all good and well on some level. What it still does not tell us is *how* we grasp first meaning, and what it is for something to be first in the order of interpretation.

So what does Davidson say about the competencies needed for grasping first meaning? Since first meaning is not grasped in terms of the prior learning of anomalous words, we might suspect that the category of malapropisms and their kin must be covered by competencies other than, or additional to, those in work with understanding dictionary meanings. The category includes such competencies as

our ability to [1] perceive a well-formed sentence when the actual utterance was incomplete or grammatically garbled, our ability to [2] interpret words we have never heard before, to [3] correct slips of the tongue, or to [4] cope with new idiolects. These phenomena threaten standard descriptions of linguistic competence (including descriptions for which I am responsible).¹⁰³

What concerns 1, we might say that we complete an utterance so as to make (grammatical) sense of it. This corresponds nicely to Davidson’s principle of rational accommodation which says that you should interpret the agent to be as rational as possible according to your own standards. This is of course a good general principle, but it could explain literally all we have dealt with of problems in this and previous chapters, and hence it falls on its own unreasonableness that it should count as significantly *explanatory* of any of these problems. That we in fact have a strong intuition about grammatical correctness, might, without having to be justified on its own account here, be what Davidson has in mind. These intuitions would

¹⁰³ Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” 95. Note the parenthesis! It is important for our exegetical project that Davidson is here explicit about difficulties with his original approach in supplying a (lean mean) “interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance”.

count as reason enough to complete or re-interpret grammatically confusing utterances. What about 2 then? This allows one to interpret new words in the context of a sentence with familiar words and a familiar structure, and one may of course draw on the circumstance for additional information. Again, this is all good and well, but it is not very informative. The same goes for 3 and 4. To correct slips of the tongue would mainly fall in under the reasons given in 1 (and maybe 2), and 4 would fall under what I said in 2.

Now, what Davidson would say, is that these capacities are not to be counted as part of our *linguistic competence*, understood *traditionally* as knowing a shared language prior to a successful verbal exchange. Not even our passing theories, those that we need to converge on for communication to be successful, is to count as linguistic competence (so understood). The same goes for our prior theories, Davidson says, because neither “describes what we could call the language a person knows, and neither theory characterizes a speaker’s or interpreter’s linguistic competence”.¹⁰⁴ We are seemingly left in the dark as to what *would* count as linguistic competence according to Davidson, and we seem to be on our own. I will return to this in the next section.

Many of the things I have said so far have been carried by a background of Grice’s conception of the recognition of intentions. It is the intention of uttering a sentence which will be taken to mean what one intends it to mean that justifies Davidson’s singling out first meanings. This is in effect Grice’s theory of communicative intentions. A definition of successful communication according to Davidson is the intention “to be taken to mean what one wants to be taken to mean”.¹⁰⁵ This also reflects what I have said about the importance of one’s dispositions to use words as essential for understanding meaning. If I intend to be understood to mean arrangement when I use ‘derangement’, I can do this if I have reason to believe that my word will be taken to mean arrangement. The literal meaning of an utterance “gets its life from those situations in which someone intends (or assumes or expects) that his words will be understood in a certain way, and they are. (...) how he intended to be understood, and was understood, is what (...) his words, *literally meant* on that occasion”.¹⁰⁶ This once again shows how first meaning may be thought of in semantic terms, and how a truth-oriented theory of meaning is relativized to speakers and not to “a language”. It is the idiolect which is primary, not “the language”. Our question, however, remains. In virtue of what does an interpreter grasp first meaning, and how is it different from grasping speaker

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁵ Davidson, “The Social Aspect of Language,” 120.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. (my italics).

meaning? A first stab at it could be to say that first meaning is not grasped *in terms of* the dictionary meaning of the words. The same goes for speaker meaning; you do not *decode* what I meant to pragmatically convey to you in terms of the words of my utterance; you *infer* my intentions from the evidence supplied. So a conversational implicature, for example, might be inferred following this Gricean process:

A man who, by (in, when) saying (...) that *p* has implicated that *q*, may be said to have conversationally implicated that *q*, provided that (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, *q* is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say *p* (or doing so in those terms) consistent with this presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out (...) that the supposition mentioned in (2) is required.¹⁰⁷

According to Grice at least, it is *by* saying *p* that you give evidence for your speaker meaning. It is not *through* saying *p*, as it would be if all you communicated was what would always be communicated by an utterance of *p* (e.g. Davidson's high-level dictionary meaning).

Furthermore, what the speaker said could only be made sense of in light of an additional assumption *q*; this is what we identify as speaker meaning. If we stick to (an adaption of) Mrs. Malaprop, then we can see that her irony about the nice arrangement of epithets could only be worked out by the speaker if he had some reasons to believe that *p* ('a nice arrangement of epithets') could only have made sense (under guidance of the cooperative principle) if she had meant that *q* ('a terrible arrangement of epithets'). This, of course, cannot be formalized in any intuitive sense, because implicatures of this kind are almost always particularized. They are bound by the particular context in which they are interpreted. (One could be wrong about someone's intentions. One might think that someone is being ironic about something, while in fact they are not. This is one way of showing how it is not through saying *p* that you communicate *q*, but by (or in/when) saying it. This is reflected by the fact that speaker meaning can be cancelled.)

How should we categorize first meaning under this Gricean view? First meaning, I said, is not carried by the dictionary meaning of the sentence either. It is not in terms of what she dictionary-said *r* that the interpreter understands Mrs. Malaprop as first meaning *s*. But of course it cannot be that the interpreter has direct access to the speaker's intention, for in that case verbal communication would be superfluous. The interpreter rationally accommodates Mrs. Malaprop to have meant *s* when she said *r*. We could say that, according to this view, the

¹⁰⁷ H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," 1975, in *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., ed by A. P. Martinich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176.

difference between speaker meaning and first meaning is that Mrs. Malaprop did not misuse her words on purpose – she did not provide what she thought would be sufficient clues for the interpreter to work out what she really meant (e.g. what is given in 1-3 in the Gricean conditions quoted). She did not intend to communicate something else than what she said (on the two-way distinction view, disregarding irony). Except, a difference between what the speaker was aware of or not cannot be the differentiating principle. This is seen in the fact that anomalies occur both consciously and unconsciously, or intentionally and unintentionally. A speaker could misuse her words *on purpose*. If she was to do this, then what would constitute a difference between whatever clues she provided for you to reach her intended (first) meaning, and the clues provided in the case of speaker meaning? A clear case which transcends that issue focuses on the dictionary meaning of the words used, though not in terms of them (that is, as what is “encoded” by them). Whereas speaker meaning is not in any obvious sense *carried* by the dictionary meaning of the words, first meaning is. Speaker meaning provides clues that normally go beyond what the words dictionary mean, while first meaning can only be grasped by appealing, in some sense, to the dictionary meaning of the words. As Grice writes, “the implicature is not carried by what is said, but only by the saying of what is said”.¹⁰⁸ Anomalies, in contrast, are resolved as a consequence of what the (anomalous) words mean in the prior theory of the speaker. So, one would not have reason to believe that Mrs. Malaprop first meant ‘a nice arrangement ...’ if she was to use words not “close” in meaning or sound to her intended meaning. It matters what words you use, and that is obvious, but it is not equally obvious *how* it matters in different ways in the case of speaker meaning and first meaning.

You have a general idea about what the words that people use to express their thoughts mean, and this is reflected in your prior theories. When these words do not fulfill the rationality constraint implicit in the principle of charity, this signals you for ways to accommodate the speaker, and these accommodations are reflected in the passing theory. In the case of speaker meaning, however, you do not adjust the words used. You do not perform semantic adjustments on the words uttered; you perform general rational adjustments of the agent’s general intentions. Of course, you invoke rational adjustment of the agent both in the case of speaker meaning and first meaning, but only in the latter do you assign new semantic roles to the words used (and possibly implement these in the passing theory for that speaker). What would justify an interpreter in understanding Mrs. Malaprop as first meaning ‘a nice

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 181.

arrangement ...' is a combination of the principle of charity and adjustments of the meaning of the words in the prior theory for Mrs. Malaprop. The same is not true of the process for speaker meaning, for here you work with whatever thought is conveyed by the meaning of the words, and this thought gives you reason to infer speaker meaning. In the case of anomalies, there is no clear or rational thought conveyed in terms of the words used, because they are incomplete or otherwise gibberish, and the interpreter must hence process semantic adjustments (in light of the principle of charity).

This way of interpreting the tripartite distinction between first, dictionary and speaker meaning seems, as far as the *issues* go, plausible. Nonetheless, we might ask if we are not sinning against Davidson's non-necessity claim if we take the dictionary meaning of the words as essential for arriving at the first meaning of the words. I said in section 4iv. that "what Davidson denies is that conventions or regularities, or prior learning of the use of words, play a necessary role in communication." But have we not just seen that the prior knowledge of the meaning of the words is necessary in the case of anomaly uses? Well, no. What we have depended upon is the meaning of the words of a linguistic agent as given in a prior theory. A prior theory is not anything like words understood as governed by conventions, or a shared structure called a common language. And it is here the crux of my argument lies. We can now make sense of Davidson's first meanings in terms of dictionary meaning *without* losing the primacy of idiolects over language, and still hold on to an epistemically realistic RI. It is important to be able to retain the spirit of "NDE" as there is, according to Davidson, no such thing as a shared language beyond prior and passing theories. If there is, it is a *de facto* abstraction from successful communication. Understanding – Davidson's definition of successful communication – is what is important and primary. It is understanding that gives life to meaning, not the other way around. Semantics is what can be abstracted from successful verbal interactions where speakers have used words which are taken to mean what the speaker wanted them to be taken to mean.

As a final step I would like to elaborate the semantic nature of first meaning (and dictionary meaning) further. What we have done up to now is the building of a coherent exegesis which can make sense of the air of oddness which attaches to the concept of first meaning, and how this can be grasped. The next thing to do is to show in more detail what we mean when we call first meaning semantic. We would also need to address the question of whether this is still meant to model linguistic competence, as Davidson claims a theory of truth for a language does.

5iv. First Meaning: A Semantic Kind?

The latest publication of an original text by Davidson is *Truth and Predication*, published posthumously. Even though pragmatic considerations of what utterances mean, when spoken in context, seem to more and more permeate Davidson's philosophy of language, it is important to see what he wishes to keep from the pre-1984 period. "Truth", he says, "is the most obvious semantic property of sentences, and provides the clearest explanation of what suits sentences to such tasks as expressing judgments or conveying information".¹⁰⁹ Truth, besides its essential contribution to semantics, is also, we remember, essential to thought. I discussed the concept of error (and hence of truth) in section 3ii. where I said that "beliefs require as a possibility that they can be false, they require that you have the concept of error." We recall that belief is central to thought, for the reason that it is only within the pattern of beliefs that thoughts can be identified. Furthermore, one can only be corrected in communication, so the concept of error, and hence belief and thought, are dependent on language in the sense that it is only here that the concept of truth and error *have application*. Truth, then, is for Davidson as essential for our human nature as our hearts and heads are.

In relation to language, truth is that which lets us understand what people mean with their sentences. What is present in *Truth and Predication* is the continuous belief in stating truth conditions for all natural language sentences. Herein lays Davidson's ongoing commitment to the formal approach to language through truth-conditional semantics. He writes:

Many of the sentences of natural language do not have fixed truth conditions since different utterances of any sentence containing tensed verbs, demonstratives, or other indexical words may differ in truth from utterance to utterance. One way this difficulty can be met is by relativizing the truth conditions of such sentences to a time, place, speaker, and perhaps other parameters. (...) Since the question whether, or to what extent, such accommodation is possible has been much discussed, I shall not pursue it here.¹¹⁰

This is not long ago. He is in the midst of the ongoing debate that to a large degree falls within the literature on the semantics-pragmatics distinction. How do we provide truth conditions for a range of language phenomena which many claim are irreducible to formal analysis? Since utterances of the "same sentence" do not, as Davidson says, have fixed truth conditions, we are of course forced into the pragmatic field to somehow accompany this

¹⁰⁹ Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 154.

dimension of natural languages. The question is, of course, how much we should let “pragmatics soak right in through semantics”, as Borg says.¹¹¹

I have not focused on the technical details in the debate surrounding the semantics-pragmatics interface, but have instead tried to gain a meta-perspective on underlying assumptions, and to an even larger degree to find out how Davidson can be understood in terms of such a distinction. In chapter 1 I quoted (the contextualist) Bach as saying that truth-conditional semantics is “the naive assumption that the output of a semantic theory for a language is a (recursive) specification of the truth conditions for all its (declarative) sentences”.¹¹² This naive assumption is Davidson’s assumption. Or so it is claimed. We also saw that Carston cashed out her linguistic underdeterminacy thesis in terms of “the meaning encoded in the linguistic expressions” and “the relatively stable meaning in a linguistic system”, in order to see how linguistic meaning so construed “underdetermines the proposition expressed”.¹¹³ Stability is, as we have (implicitly) seen, a concept which is often assumed to be *essential* for a semantic theory. Trine Antonsen, for instance, in her MA thesis on Bach and problems for semantic theories, says that “what we want semantics to describe and explain are the repeatable and stable contributions of linguistic expressions in any utterance”.¹¹⁴ We know now that this picture cannot be allowed to serve as a premise for the debate over semantics and pragmatics without being argued for, due to Davidson’s arguments against “encoded meaning” and similar constructions. I think this assumption of stability serves as one of the most important and ubiquitous premises, and this is why it cannot go unargued for. That stability should be a necessary property of a semantic theory can be shown to be doubtful given that the Davidsonian framework of prior and passing theories – constructed within an epistemically realistic radical interpreter and captured by a T-theory – is successful.¹¹⁵ What semantics should be able to describe under a Davidsonian framework, is what we converge on when we converge on passing theories. This should be covered by truth-conditional semantics, but it is a *prima facie* falsity to assume that this must be done under the governance of stability. However, as I said earlier, we do not want our semantics to seldomly correspond to the usual meaning of the words. It should, similar to how I construed the epistemic position of the RI, be empirically realistic. Again, there is a *prima facie* falsity to

¹¹¹ Emma Borg, *Minimal Semantics* (New York: OUP, 2004), 56.

¹¹² Bach, “Minding the Gap”, 37.

¹¹³ Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*, 19-20.

¹¹⁴ Trine Antonsen, “Semantics without Truth,” Master’s thesis (University of Oslo, 2008, in DUO, <http://www.duo.uio.no/sok/work.html?WORKID=86837&fid=47012> (accessed April 4, 2011), 17.

¹¹⁵ Notice how the unargued for premise is not only present in contextualist positions on language understanding, but formalist positions as well. Cappelen and Lepore clearly argue for a stability in semantics, and they are meant to be neo-Davidsonians. Of course, being a neo-Davidsonian is not a homogeneous category.

assume that we need stability in a theory on semantics, and it is an additional *prima facie* falsity to assume that instability is identical with chaos. All we want is flexibility and dynamiticity. Bach's naïveté assumption cannot be so easily justified if we need not give the truth-conditions for all sentences in abstraction from their use. How should we accommodate the flexible first meaning under the heading of semantics?

5iv.a. The Semantic Programme Revisited

Throughout Davidson's discussions on his theory of communication we are often given glimpse of what his semantics should include. These reflections are often peripheral to the discussions at hand, but they reflect his more general views on linguistic competence.

We need to separate two different questions so as to keep this discussion precise. On one side we have the question about how we are to treat dictionary meaning and – more importantly for our concern – first meaning semantically. I said that what Davidson wishes to illuminate with a theory of truth for a natural language is the ability or competence one could have (or maybe has) that lets one interpret an arbitrary utterance in that language.

Furthermore, this is a project undertaken by the RI. Davidson gives us this in forms of theories, and calls it so due to the need for a constructive account of the linguistic ability. Any theory of meaning must give a constructive account of the meaning of the sentences, so that we do not ignore what seems to be a necessary feature of a language: its infinite productivity on the basis of finite resources. As a consequence, an account of linguistic competence must be a recursive account. One must show how the semantic primitives, together with rules of combination, form new sentences. If one has a number of primitives, not to be defined any further, and some rules of combination, then one can show how these can form indefinitely many sentences. To illuminate such a competence is to answer the question of what could be thought of as necessary in linguistic communication.¹¹⁶ (To accommodate, for instance, different uses of the same predicate, I suggested that semantics need not necessarily be stable, and hence that primitives could be thought of as dynamic and flexible. How this can be so must be grappled with: How are we to think of the axioms for the finite set of expressions if these are in some sense not stable? One reason why this is important to address is seen in that

¹¹⁶ Additionally, how one should retain an autonomy of meaning understood in an unstable framework must of course also be addressed. It seems, nonetheless, natural to ask in what sense meaning has to be stable for the purpose of *oratio obliqua*. To what degree must we keep an unchanged meaning throughout speech reports or attitude reports? Why, in other words, should we demand of a theory of meaning that it describes the content expressed in normal speech or speech reports as *identical* throughout replications of it? It is not as if the thought expressed by A in conversation with me, B, now, by being brought up in a subsequent conversation with C, where I report A's beliefs as they were expressed to me, need to be *identical*. How could they ever be? How could I ever report someone else's thought precisely the way he expressed it to me, that is, understood as content to be located in natural language meaning that would do complete justice to A's thoughts? It is at least not obvious that stability is a requirement for a theory of meaning or communication.

the axioms should serve as our *finite* base. We must for this reason be careful so as to not include too much into the axioms.)

On the other side, there is the question of what suffices for linguistic communication. It is not obvious that a truth theory provides sufficient grounds for interpreting an arbitrary utterance. Here we need, among other things, to answer how we go from a prior theory to a passing theory, and this remains an open question as far as Davidson is concerned. A truth theory cannot account for “the inflow of new information”¹¹⁷ as Davidson says, and this leaves room open, as far as I can tell, for some sort of pragmatic enrichment beyond merely formal treatment of indexical expressions. That the theory we construct, a passing theory, can be described in Davidsonian terms (i.e. truth conditionally) is one thing. That the building of such a passing theory from a prior theory cannot be formalized is another. It is important to note that he *does* grant that a theory of truth may be constrained by certain pragmatic phenomena. On the resolution of ambiguity, to take one example, he assesses Bar-Hillel’s observation that “the context of utterance might easily resolve the ambiguity (...) and yet the resolution could depend on general knowledge in a way that could not (practically, at least) be captured by a formal theory.”¹¹⁸ Davidson concludes that we should accept such limitations on his theory, but that “it may still be possible to give a theory that captures an important concept of meaning”.¹¹⁹ In the same essay he also says that we might need to go from sentences to utterances to give truth-conditions. This would fit well in with his theory of communication in “NDE”, where we see that there is no general theory that can capture the meaning of all utterances, due to the lack of overlap between prior theories, and the inventiveness of passing theories.

Considerations such as these make Davidson a hard philosopher to categorically subsume under a formalist or contextualist stance within the semantics-pragmatics debate. I will say some things in regard to the first of the two main questions in this section on how we are to understand first meaning semantically. In the final section of this thesis I will briefly present an approach to the more open question of what it is that happens when we go from a prior to a passing theory. This will for apparent reasons be an open and suggestive section.

A theory of meaning given in terms of truth is a structure that bears logical relations between its propositions. If non-synonymous utterances of the sentence determines the

¹¹⁷ Donald Davidson, “Communication and Convention,” 1984, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 279.

¹¹⁸ Donald Davidson, “Semantics for Natural Languages,” 1970, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 59.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

respective propositions in any given truth theory, then the propositions will yield different truth theories for the different propositional utterances, due to the logical relations within the system. Both the prior theories and the passing theories are thought of as such full-blown truth theories. By that I mean that a passing theory could be a “theory for an entire language, even though its expected field of application is vanishingly small”.¹²⁰ So for instance when the interpreter forms a passing theory for Mrs. Malaprop, he must assign a semantic role to her malaprops. Therefore the role of ‘derangement’ takes over the role that ‘arrangement’ had in his prior theory for Mrs. Malaprop, and the “entire burden of that role, with all its implications for logical relations to other words, phrases, and sentences, must be carried along by the passing theory”.¹²¹ In this sense passing theories are full-blown truth theories. Moreover, we recall the compositionality thesis saying that the meaning of words depend on the role they play in determining the truth of the utterances in which they occur. Utterances are made up of such finite elements that together with rules of combination, form truth-evaluable (i.e. meaningful) utterances. One of the essential points about the insistence on a truth theory for all theories, whether they be prior or passing, is that the truth predicate “is T”, as defined by Tarski’s Convention T, covers *all* truth-evaluable utterances, that is, infinitely many. In power of this we can account for the recursive and compositional structure of language (whether conceived of as a prior or passing theory), a necessary condition for any theory of meaning.

One thing is to present a formal account of meaning. Another is to tie it to linguistic competence. We remember from my earlier discussion that I said that “a theory of meaning given in truth-theoretical terms *describes* or *models* linguistic competence”. I also said that Davidson challenges the traditional view of linguistic competence, targeted as “the systematic knowledge or competence of the speaker or interpreter [as] learned in advance of occasions of interpretation and [as being] conventional in character”.¹²² Now, it is quite clear in “NDE” that he still wishes to hold that truth theories, as represented by prior and passing theories, model linguistic competence. How one moves from a prior to a passing theory, however, is not described as *linguistic* competence. There seems to be a lot of work being done by a competency other than the linguistic one, and so a Davidsonian account of the latter becomes very restrained and minimal. To see how minimal it becomes, consider this passage from Davidson, where he describes in part how an interpreter “alters his theory, entering hypotheses about new names, *altering the interpretation of familiar predicates*, and revising

¹²⁰ Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” 103.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 93.

past interpretations of particular utterances in the light of new evidence”.¹²³ This process is the modification of a prior theory and simultaneously the construction of a passing theory for a particular communicative situation. The reason I italicized a part of the quote is due to the ubiquitous phenomenon of vagueness in natural languages. If the interpretation of what a predicate is meant to denote here and now (which may be radically different from context to context, just think of comparable adjectives) is not to be subsumed under linguistic competence, then a considerable portion of the explanatory role of natural languages has been delegated to the pragmaticists. This is a substantial exegetical point! Moreover, Davidson seems pessimistic about the possibility of *any* general theory about what one knows or is competent in that suffices for interpretation, because “any such general framework, by virtue of the features that make it general, will by itself be insufficient for interpreting particular utterances”.¹²⁴ It is clear, nonetheless, that the construction of a truth theory for a speaker (a transient passing theory) should model or describe the linguistic competence of an interpreter, but it has also become clear that the process of arriving at a passing theory from a prior theory is a mysterious one. More importantly, it is a process where a considerable degree of the success conditions for verbal communication is to be found. It becomes natural to conclude this thesis with the promised suggestion for ways ahead in thinking about this mysterious process. This process is absolutely essential for the purpose of explaining what natural language is, and the way it is used to communicate.

5v. Suggestion: Going From A Prior to a Passing Theory

Davidson leaves us with very few thoughts on what suffices for linguistic communication to succeed beyond the Gricean recognition of semantic intentions – which of course is left vague and truistic as it stands – and his theory of truth for a “language” (i.e. speakers). The Tarski-style theory of truth that Davidson has proposed for understanding meaning in natural languages is his most influential legacy in the tradition of the philosophy of language. In the passing of years from the publication of “Truth and Meaning” in the late 60’s and to “NDE” which has been much discussed in this thesis, the truth theory has become marginalized. Some try to approach this lack of explanatory force by doing hard work in formal semantics. The success of this enterprise is open to debate, as it is still on-going.

¹²³ Ibid, 100 (my italics).

¹²⁴ Ibid, 104.

I would like to suggest an alternative way one could accommodate Davidson's view on meaning and communication, so that it could serve a more comprehensive explanatory role. I particularly see the need for an elaboration of the competencies that is involved in moving from a prior to a passing theory, so I would consider this briefly and in a suggestive manner.

A tempting route to take is via Relevance Theory, as the concept of relevance, on the face of it, seems very closely tied to the assumptions specified in the principle of charity. This is especially true for the agreement part of the principle, and the needed specification of the concept of salience in that regard. Having said that, how are we to deal with the discrepancy that Carston pointed out between Davidson's theory of interpretation and the relevance theoretic framework?¹²⁵ Relevance Theory has a *modular* view of the mind, while Davidson apparently does not. This is reflected in his holistic approach to interpretation, where he views the interpretation of speech as running simultaneously and interdependently with the interpretation of actions in general.

Withstanding this discrepancy, I find it useful to stress that Davidson put much weight on the Gricean recognition of (semantic) intentions, and this is true of Relevance Theory as well, as the theory is precisely "an attempt to work out in detail (...) the expression and recognition of intentions".¹²⁶ It is also true that the two approaches to understanding linguistic agents are similar in that they attribute beliefs and meanings to speakers in order to make sense of their behavior (though there may be a discrepancy between the perspective of the interpreter and that of the interpretee), referred to in the literature as theories of mind-reading. This provides reasons for why I find it useful to consider the similarities and differences between Relevance Theory and Davidson's theory of interpretation.

Relevance Theory has over the years moved from treating the interpretation of utterances as undertaken by central processes (general world competence as I have called it), and over to treating it as a "dedicated comprehension module with its own particular principles and mechanisms".¹²⁷ This is a pragmatically driven module, as Relevance Theory views the study of speaker meaning as "metapsychological through and through".¹²⁸ This means that the inferential processes both construct and evaluate speaker meaning on the basis of the evidence supplied (i.e. a logical form). (The construction part is possibly similar to

¹²⁵ Carston and Powell, "Relevance Theory - New Directions and Developments."

¹²⁶ Wilson and Sperber, "Relevance Theory," 607.

¹²⁷ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Pragmatics, Modularity and Mind-Reading," *Mind and Language* 17, no 1-2 (February/April 2002), 4.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Recanati's 'free' pragmatic processes which do work on the logical form itself in producing sentences which can then be evaluated.) There are several reasons for their change of minds, among them the degree of complexity in attributing intentions to an agent in terms of her speech acts as opposed to attributing intentions in terms of her non-communicative actions. The former is meant to be more complex. They write that research has showed that three-year-olds manage to communicate linguistically, while failing so-called false belief tasks. This is meant to show that they cannot attribute the less complex intentional states to agents, while still being able to attribute the more complex intentions involved in (verbal) communication. This is meant to marshal support for the claim that the pragmatic processes involved in inferring speaker intentions are processed in a task-specific module. A second argument given for the complexity of intention attribution is that such attributions are much more limited in the case of non-communicative actions as opposed to communicative ones, simply because "we can say so much more than we can do".¹²⁹ I am rather convinced by the complexity arguments as they are represented here. It seems to provide *prima facie* reasons to believe that the interpretation of communicative intentions needs another explanation than what can be given for intention attribution in non-communicative cases.¹³⁰

Relevance Theory presents, on one hand, a cognitive account of what goes on when we recognize Gricean intentions, and hence it could provide a framework for Davidson's need for an elaborated account of the interpretation of semantic intentions. The semantics, on the other hand, is systematic, and it could be reasonable to ask what the construction of comprehensive and transient truth theories for speakers demand of the cognition of interpreters. These theories model a competence, so it would be fruitful to ask what this competence cognitively consists in. We must also remember that if the process from a prior to a passing theory takes the route via pragmatic inferences, then a possible semantic-specific module cannot autonomously construct truth theories, as the input (and output) in general is dependent on pragmatic considerations of the agents as a whole.

I would like to end this thesis with an interesting suggestion that is worth thinking about more thoroughly. I have given some reasons for why Relevance Theory and Davidson's theory of interpretation in some respects overlap. I have also rehearsed the problem of differences in their account on mental architecture (though Davidson is, to my knowledge, silent on the issue). But what if Davidson's theory of interpretation, undertaken by the RI,

¹²⁹

Ibid., 14.

¹³⁰

Thanks to Elin Munkerud for pointing this out to me.

could be understood within a modular minded theory of mind-reading? If it still was not comparable with RT, we would at least have gotten past one (or the) impediment. I find such a suggestion by what Sperber & Wilson consider, somewhat in passing, as the *simulation theory*. This theory of mind-reading strikes me as Davidsonian minded, as it “attribute[s] intentions by imaginatively simulating the action we are interpreting, thus discovering in ourselves the intention that underlies it.”¹³¹ But even more so from this passage from Sperber & Wilson on why it is *not* a good theory of mind-reading:

As an account of interpretation, this is not too promising (...) since the same sentence can be used to convey quite different meanings in different situations, a hearer who is simulating the speaker’s linguistic action in order to retrieve her meaning must provide a considerable amount of contextualisation, *based on particular beliefs about the speaker’s beliefs, preferences, and so on.*¹³²

This is precisely what the principle of charity is meant to cover: that we can assume that the speaker’s beliefs are much like our own (and true), and additionally provide contextualisation for the interpretation of utterances (as reflected in the (yet to be argued for) agreement part of the principle). I think of it as worthwhile to consider possible approaches to a cognitive account of the mind which can accommodate Davidson’s vague strategy for moving from a prior to a passing theory. Relevance Theory, with its cognitive principles, seems like a candidate worth pursuing, and the modularity issue need not pose a compatibility problem on the face of it.

Final Remarks

For the purpose of approaching Donald Davidson’s philosophy of language, it has been beneficial to present a background to understand him against. The main motive force behind this thesis was to interpret Davidson’s intentions in “NDE”. In that essay the breaking point between semantics and pragmatics is clearly actualized. Therefore it was reasonable to direct critical questions to Davidson’s programme in the philosophy of language in terms of the semantics-pragmatics interface.

As this thesis can be clearly characterized by its exegetical method, the purpose of asking questions and proposing answers is easily identified throughout my discussions. It has taken time to penetrate Davidson’s programme, so part one of this thesis concentrated on the explication of two of the most comprehensive projects for Davidson: the suggestion to apply a

¹³¹ Ibid., 13

¹³² Ibid., (my italics).

theory of truth for the purpose of illuminating the concept of meaning, and the project of radical interpretation in shedding light on the holistic nature of meaning and belief. Radical interpretation is moreover deeply connected with issues discussed under the header of semantics and pragmatics. Hence a more thorough discussion of the RI suggested itself naturally.

While I in part two have constructed a plausible interpretation of the RI in connection with Davidson's concerns in "NDE", this also provided me with arguments against L&L's conception of Davidson's RI. I have, furthermore, showed how there is a tension in the project of radical interpretation. This becomes apparent when one moves from the study of sentence meaning and over to the study of intended meaning. The RI should illuminate meaning in both cases, but the difference between sentence meaning and intended meaning causes problems in this regard. This is mainly due to the nature of the evidence available to the RI: the circumstances of utterance. That there is the further distinction between intended meanings in first meaning and speaker meaning is yet another explanatory difficulty that I had to deal with.

I also made sure that we maintained an epistemically realistic RI, while still holding on to important Davidsonian commitments. Particularly distinct here is the primacy of semantic intentions over the traditional views of prior, shared languages. I showed how the latter is no more than a *de facto* abstraction from successful communicative interactions. I also managed to explain how first meaning is grasped in terms of dictionary meaning, while still retaining the mentioned primacy. This was done by introducing a tripartite distinction between three levels of abstraction: first meaning in passing theories, a revised conception of dictionary meaning in prior theories, and finally the set of all such prior theories.

We can now also see that this tripartite distinction serves several purposes. First it provided a plausible view on how first meanings are grasped, and hence how it is not reducible to speaker meaning. Secondly, but not thematized in my discussion, is another more Davidsonian minded remedy for the problem of determining linguistic meaning. I spent a considerable amount of time trying to individuate sentence meaning within Davidson's programme. I had no solution to the problem other than suggesting alternative methods of approaching the holistic concept of meaning. Jeff Malpas was central in this regard. We can see now, however, that we could understand the autonomy of meaning as that which is reflected in the abstraction of prior theories. The autonomy of meaning must not be thought of as independent and *prior* to (successful) uses of language, but rather as abstractions from it.

What secures understanding, and hence successful communication, is the recognition of semantic intentions and speaker intentions.

As much has been adequately resolved, a lot is still left unanswered. I said that we have no good account of the workings of natural languages if we cannot show how the main purpose of it is understood: the expression of thoughts. While Davidson reduces this to the Gricean recognition of intentions, he thereby marginalizes his own truth theory. While the latter should show how language is productive, he leaves too much to be explained by pragmatics. This is then another important reflection to keep in mind from “NDE”. The process of producing passing theories, and hence the explanatory grounds for how we come to share thoughts, is left utterly mysterious within Davidson’s account of meaning.

I suggested one way out of this impasse. There is remaining work to be done in developing a modular view of the mind which can accommodate Davidson. If we wish to keep his central insights into the nature of meaning and language, I propose that Relevance Theory is one good candidate. The most important reason for this is of course that their theory is designed to explain the recognition of intentions. I cannot, at first glance, see any deep compatibility difficulties with Davidson’s truth-conditional semantics and Relevance Theory’s cognitive account of communication. I suggest one looks into the possibilities of moving past the deadlock Carston and Powell seem to think is standing between the integration of Davidson’s programme and Relevance Theory.

Bibliography

- Antonsen, Trine. "Semantics without Truth." Master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2008. In DUO, <http://www.duo.uio.no/sok/work.html?WORKID=86837&fid=47012> (accessed April 4, 2011).
- Austin, J. L. "Performative Utterances." 1961. In *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., edited by A. P. Martinich, 136-145. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Bach, Kent. "Conversational Implicature." *Mind & Language* 9, no 2 (June 1994): 124–162.
- _____. "Minding the Gap." In *The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*, edited by Claudia Bianchi, 27-43. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2004.
- Borg, Emma. *Minimal Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- _____. "Minimalism versus Contextualism in Semantics." Draft of 2006. University of Reading. http://www.reading.ac.uk/AcaDepts/ld/Philos/borg/Minimalism%20vs%20Contextualism%20in%20Semantics_2.doc (accessed February 22, 2011).
- Cappelen, Herman and Ernie Lepore. *Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005
- _____. "Précis of *Insensitive Semantics*." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, no 2 (September 2006): 425-434.
- Carston, Robyn. *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002.
- Carston, Robyn and Georg Powell. "Relevance Theory - New Directions and Developments." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, edited by Ernest Lepore and Barry C. Smith, 341 – 360. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Corcoran, John. "convention T." In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert Audi, 185. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- _____. "Tarski, Alfred." In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert Audi, 902. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Davidson, Donald. "Reply to Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore." In *Reflecting Davidson: Donald Davidson Responding to an International Forum of Philosophers*. Edited by Ralf Stoecker, 77-84. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993.
- _____. "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages." 1965. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 3-15. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Truth and Meaning." 1967. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed.,

- 17-36. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "On Saying That." 1968. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 93-108. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Semantics for Natural Languages." 1970. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 55-64. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Radical Interpretation." 1973. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 125-139. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Belief and the Basis of Meaning." 1974. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 141-154. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Thought and Talk." 1975. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 155-170. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Reply to Foster." 1976. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 171-179. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics." 1977. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 199-214. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Reality without Reference." 1977. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 215-225. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Communication and Convention." 1984. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 2nd ed., 265-280. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Rational Animals." 1982. In *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Reprint 2009. 95-105. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Three Varieties of Knowledge." 1991. In *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Reprint 2009. 205-220. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- _____. *Truth and Predication*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.
- _____. "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs." 1986. In *Truth, Language, and History*. Reprint 2009. 89-107. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- _____. "The Third Man." 1992. In *Truth, Language, and History*. Reprint 2009. 159-165. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- _____. "Locating Literary Language." 1993. In *Truth, Language, and History*. Reprint 2009. 167-181. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- _____. "The Social Aspect of Language." 1994. In *Truth, Language, and History*. Reprint 2009. 109-125. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- _____. "Dialectic and Dialogue." 1994. In *Truth, Language, and History*. Reprint 2009. 251-259. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Evnine, Simon. *Donald Davidson*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- Feldman, Richard. "Charity, principle of." 1998. REP online. <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/P006SECT4> (accessed October 29, 2010).
- Glanzberg, Michael. "Truth." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2009 Edition), editor Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/truth/>. (accessed April 22, 2011)
- Grice, H. P. "Meaning." 1957. In *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., edited by A. P. Martinich, 108-113. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- _____. "Logic and Conversation." 1975. In *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., edited by A. P. Martinich, 171-181. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Hookway, Christopher. *Quine: Language, Experience and Reality*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988
- Lepore, Ernie and Kirk Ludwig. *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*. Reprint 2010. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- _____. *Donald Davidson's Truth-Theoretic Semantics*. Reprinted 2009. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Loar, Brian. "Meaning." In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert Audi, 545-550. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Malpas, J. E. "Analysis and Hermeneutics." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25, no 2 (1992): 93-123.
- _____. *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning: Holism, Truth, Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Malpas, Jeff. "Donald Davidson." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition), editor Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/davidson/> (accessed October 28, 2010)
- Recanati, François. "Pragmatics and Semantics." In *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, reprint 2007, edited by Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, 442-462. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.
- _____. *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Rickless, Samuel. "Plato's *Parmenides*." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), editor Edward N. Zalta <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/plato-parmenides> (accessed April 24 2011).

- Russell, Bertrand. "Mr. Strawson on Referring." In *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., edited by A. P. Martinich, 261-264. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995.
- _____. "Pragmatics, Modularity and Mind-Reading." *Mind and Language* 17, no 1-2 (February/April 2002): 3-23.
- Stanley, Jason. "Context and Logical Form." *Linguistics and Philosophy* 23, no 4 (2000): 391-434.
- Talmage, C. J. L. "Literal Meaning, Conventional Meaning and First Meaning." *Erkenntnis* 40, no 2 (March 1994): 213-225.
- Tarski, Alfred. "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics." In *The Philosophy of Language*, international 5th ed., edited by A. P. Martinich, 85-107. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Wheeler, Darrell. *On Davidson*. CA, USA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2003.
- Wilson, Deirdre and Dan Sperber. "Relevance Theory." In *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, reprint 2007, edited by Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, 607-632. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

